MAN *of* STRIFE

GROVE WILSON

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MAN *of* STRIFE

By
GROVE WILSON

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Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!

Book of Jeremiah XV, II

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MOTHER AND SON

I

IT was no use. He could not escape. He had a hundred things to do, and strained nerves drove him at copy or assignment book with frenzy—an unaccomplishing frenzy. There sat his uncle, discolored nose, ragged moustache, bald head, reeking with stupid prosperity. There sat his brother, with sleek black hair, face slightly twisted, an imperfection in the iris of the left eye, bloated, fairly, with a sense of duty.

"If you get a minute, Bruce, Uncle George wants to talk to you." The words had come from the twisted mouth.

"I know, I know. I've got a thousand things to do. No matter. . . . What is it, Uncle George!"

Uncle George took his cigar out of his mouth and drew his chair closer to the big glass-topped desk.

"Clarence has been talking to me about sending your mother East to some . . ."

"Yes. He saw a fool over by the University who pumped him full. Fake cancer cure. Nonsense."

Clarence flushed, outraged, indignant. "I suppose you'd rather just see her lie there and die."

"Infinitely, infinitely. Send her a thousand miles away to be tortured by a bunch of quacks? Never."

In Clarence, duty grew dominant; he became heroic with its conception. "All right. If you won't agree to that, I'll tell her what's the matter with her and let her decide."

A crushing blackness enveloped Bruce. Grotesque passions, blacker than blackness, crowded upon him. His nerves shrieked in their agony. Rage was impotent. He could not hate, could not sufficiently and enduringly hate, this creature, this man, this brother. Because of an affection, nursed by years, he must control his rage, must subdue even his horror. Slowly the blackness lifted, the roar of the office came back. Opposite him sat his brother, firm, secure in his enlargement of duty. A hard, stubborn, mediocre mind he had. Bruce knew by experience that he would keep his word—he would carry his dreadful message to the stricken mother. There was no escape; he had known from the first that there would be no escape. Dully he yielded.

"All right. Do what you like." Then he could not hold back the cry, "It's a mistake. You'll torture her to no purpose and shorten her life. You're blind, bigoted fools. But I consent, I consent. I'm as bad as you are. We're all God damned fools."

The discolored nose, the ragged moustache, the bald head, that characterized for Bruce the small prosperous uncle, withdrew themselves. Clarence lingered, his twisted face lighted with a smile of triumph. He must sound a pæan of victory: "I'm glad you're sensible. You'll be glad too, when mother comes back cured."

"Good God, how can any one be such an idiot! Get out. Go on; do your dirty work."

II

A NORTHWEST wind swept down Hennepin Avenue; an October wind, dust laden, touched with ice. Bruce faced it on his way home and shivered, unconsciously, as it tore at his light overcoat and whipped the tears into his eyes. The morning had been fine, with no promise of this bitter evening. But that was Minnesota in the fall: one could be sure of nothing except that cold weather was near. At Seventh Street he paused to let one of the big, yellow interurban cars go around the corner. There were steel gates on the car. Bruce hated those gates—unreasonably, intensely, blindly hated them. He cursed them, seen or unseen; he cursed them when they clanged to, shutting him in. He cursed them long and passionately when they clanged to, shutting him out. They were a small red spot in the midst of his mind's whiteness.

Just now he was bitter enough to shake his fist at them and rage, impotently. He was bitter at everything. Across the street the Greek's fruit store awakened his wrath anew. The October wind, with its sifted dirt, had coated the southern offerings with disgusting grime. Only air-tight glass could keep out that powdered loam.

At every step, as he went up the avenue, he drank wormwood. He was enduring, in fierce anticipation, the pain soon to be inflicted on his mother. His imagination sent his organs into cramps that tore and wrenched him. He was mad of his self-inflicted agonies. This could not last. He put a curb on his mind, directing his thoughts into new channels. He considered Clarence, older by sixteen months, actually younger, less mature, far less independent.

They had been great friends long ago. Twelve? Fourteen years? Yes, fourteen years ago. They were mere kids then. He was nearing twelve, Clarence thirteen, or a little more, and they were happy, untouched by the poverty in which they lived. He could recall that time by an incident, a turning point in his young life. His visual memory brought it back to him, clear in every detail.

In the midst of Hennepin avenue appeared a large, round, wooden tank at which the farmers watered their horses. There were no horses there now. It was harvest time and the hot August sun had turned the water tepid. He and Clarence hung over the edge of the trough, idly stirring the algæ, the green stuff that clung to the wet wood. In the water he saw his face, freckled beyond belief, and Clarence's, burned to an Indian color. They were barefooted and sketchily clad in shirt and overalls. Neither of them wore a hat and Clarence's hair was sleek (or was this an after image from the recent scene? No matter, he had an impression of sleekness). His own hair was frightful—a shock, unruly. It was a grim, painful business, combing out the snarls in the morning, where the "mice had slept."

A crowd of boys approached the tank. They were strangers or almost strangers and the town champion was at their head. They were not bad boys, they were just boys. So they fell to tormenting the outsiders. Bruce and Clarence endured their gibes, grinning deprecatorially. Their non-resistance stirred the tormentors to new outrages until one of them, Bay Dayer, threw a double handful of water into Clarence's face. The poor boy, choking, gasping, half-strangled, looked imploringly at Bruce. And Bay laughed.

It required the combined efforts of Dick Shepherd, the town champion, and Old Bert Brunn and Brick Pierce to drag Bruce off the screaming, blood-stained Dayer.

That was his first fight. It was more, he realized later, than that: It was his first hard clash with life, it was the thin edge biting into the granite of reality. At the time he had taken pride in this discovery of a fierce temper that unthroned reason, destroyed fear and lent him strength and skill. Pride touched with alarm. Even to his boyish mind it had seemed a terrible thing to go briefly unleashed, irresponsible. There met, thus, in him his father and his mother. His father, three years dead at the time of that first fight, to whom the word "restraint" had had no meaning, to whom "self-control" was unbecoming a gentlemen, came of Virginia ancestors, and all his life boasted of an outrageous temper. He had, apparently, but two articles in his creed: that a gentleman must drink and, since the Civil War, hate Virginia. To each of these he adhered with passionate devotion. Bruce was unable to account for his alcoholic mania—that was a trait, perhaps passed on by a buccaneering ancestor, who had drunk wine and cutthroats on the Spanish Main, with a tendency to indulge in other excesses—a tendency not entirely lost to his descendant. It was easier to understand the hatred. For some obscure reason, his father had turned his back upon slavery and had gone to Ohio, where, when Fort Sumpter's guns roared, he had enlisted as surgeon, or assistant surgeon, in an Ohio regiment, giving his services to those whose rifles were trained against the breasts of his family.

To his Welsh-English mother, self-control was the spirit that quickened. It was the chief virtue, it was all the virtues. She had it. Through what bitterness she had attained to this perfection Bruce did not know. To him the twenty years of her married life before his birth were mysterious, unreal. Looking at her white face (he had no recollection of ever seeing in it a touch of color), at her strong Roman nose, wide firm-lipped mouth and clear gray eyes, it was possible to trace, back of her serenity, the scars left by pain and grief and outrage. No matter. She had risen above her calamities. The horrors that had peopled her nights had fled.

So it was to Clarence, a creature land-locked, that he owed a knowledge of himself. That first fight bred introspection. He was terrified into a consideration of the thing he was. That inward looking had not been pleasant. Even now it was not pleasant to remember the black period through which he had passed.

Later on, it was Clarence who had thrust him out into the world, had hurried the struggle for existence. Clarence wanted to learn a trade and set his heart on printing. At that time, in the nineties, the wages of a printer's devil were small or nothing. There was no aid for his mother in that line. Yet he had gone ahead, and it was Bruce who took up the burden. Somehow they worried through. The cold wind, hurling itself down the Avenue, emphasized the hardships of those nightmarish days. It was then, he knew, that his face had lost its roundness and his heart its laughter. They had worried through. . . .

After all, Clarence may have been right. It was his trade that took him to Winona where he was followed shortly by his mother. When he had saved a little money out of the stress of hardships, Bruce joined them. Still work dogged him. He had literally fought his way through school, holding a small place on the morning newspaper in his effort to meet unavoidable expenses.

And his mother had worked. Those were trying years with the goal still distant. They ended, and he moved on to Minneapolis and to the University. There was more work on a

morning paper, the same paper of which he was now City Editor. But there had been more money, more for him, more for Clarence and, at last, ease, comparative ease, for his mother. Even the University was now behind him and he was entitled to write several letters after his name. He might easily have gone farther, had dreamed of going farther; but suddenly the futility of his efforts in that direction dawned upon him. He was stunned by the discovery that the University was not an entrance to life. If he was to pick the lock that closed that door, he must set about it in an entirely new way. That is to say, he discovered himself standing apart from the crowd an entity, sharply differentiated. It was the door to *his* life that was to be opened. For that he could substitute the life of no university, no clique, no guild, trade or art. In some way, in his own way, he must break that lock or remain outside, endlessly conscious of the fact that he was outside.

It might not matter to others that they were outside; did not apparently matter to Clarence, who had called him a damned fool when he gave up his work for a Ph.D. degree. It had shocked him to realize that people did not know they were outside, did not know that there was a door to be opened, a lock to be picked—a subtle, delicate lock, opened only once in a hundred years. He had sensed, when for the first time he had stood trembling before that closed door, that his mother had opened it, had opened it gently, skillfully and had passed in to become, day by day, more deeply initiated into the mysteries hidden from the mob. She knew. Ah, yes, she knew.

He paused on the doorstep of his own home, held for a moment by a realization of the things she knew. What was there in heaven or earth or hell that had not been spread before her? She had traversed the seven circles, proved their meaning and returned, white-faced and white-haired, but enlightened.

III

WHEN he entered the house, he found his wife reading in the living-room. They had been married five years, long enough to banish illusions. He knew now that the angel he had married was ignorant, inept, slothful. Recently, the initial charm had been quickened by her impending motherhood. Birth would be an experience—the flaunting of a daring mystery. Might it not pluck scales from her eyes? It at least lent her, for him, a touch of unreality, a distinguishing characteristic.

At his entrance she raised her dark eyes—she had her coloring from her French mother—and murmured:

"Cold, isn't it? D'you walk home? Dinner's waiting."

He caught the reproof, peevish, ill-timed. The glamour fled. She was no longer mother incarnate, but an ordinary pretty, spoiled girl, to whom there were no doors, closed or open. How could there be doors, or mysteries, in a world that was flat? Yes, that was it. Along with other millions, she lived in two dimensions and was helpless before the ordeals that rushed upon her from below or above her plane.

At dinner she told him, "Clarence was here. G'ing send your mother down East. I'm glad of it. Everything that can be done, should be done. Don't you think?"

Bruce twisted uneasily on his chair. He didn't want to flame out at her. It would be no use. "Sure," he muttered.

"Clarence seemed to think you opposed the plan. I told him not to be ridiculous."

"I did, I do. But it doesn't matter. She's going."

"I never in my life heard anything so funny. Don't you want her to have a chance, don't you want her to get well?"

"Good God!" Bruce cried getting to his feet. At the door, he checked himself. "Sorry, Cora. But I'm raw tonight, actually raw. Don't mind. I'll go over and see mother. Be all right when I get back."

"But you haven't finished your dinner—you haven't eaten a thing. I don't mind your 'rawness' but you must eat. Sit down."

In that moment he envied Gurth his brass color. He must eat or endure a scene. He sat down.

"I don't mind your 'rawness,' " she repeated, "but I think you might be more considerate—in my condition."

He thought: "That's part of the feminine instinct for babies—the power it gives them to tyrannize."

"I know, Cora. You mightn't think it but I try, I do try. When people decide to have a baby they should give their whole time to that one thing—go into a retreat so nothing could disturb or upset them."

"Yes? That wouldn't be very nice for the mother. I don't know how you feel, but I like to see people. . . . Tommy was here. She's a dear. It does me so much good to see her.

She's making the cutest—you aren't hearing a word I'm saying."

"Every syllable. Tommy's all right. I'm glad she's friendly. Blanche is coming soon."

"Oh," very dryly. "Blanche. That'll be nice."

"What have you against Blanche? I thought——"

"Nothing. She's nice enough. She isn't Tommy, no matter what you think."

The jealous note was unmistakable. "I? I don't think anything about it. As a matter of fact, I like Tommy better. She's much more vivacious—a better mind."

"Only she hasn't big gray eyes."

"Are you trying to quarrel, Cora?"

"Me? Who brought Blanche's name into the conversation?"

"Oh, well, I'll drop it out then."

"But not out of your mind."

For the second time he rose from the table, but this time not abruptly. He stood at her side, his tolerance restored. Why is a man always flattered when his wife is jealous without cause?

"Stop fretting, little woman. I don't care a snap of my finger for Blanche, and you know it."

"Nor for me, either. You don't care for anyone."

The hand that was resting on her shoulder froze away from it. "I'm going over to see mother, but I shan't be long. You won't mind?"

"Oh, no, of course not. It's so pleasant being here alone."

"I can't help it, Cora. I have to go."

"When is she going to the sanitarium?"

"I don't know. Soon, I suppose."

"All right. Go 'long. But don't stay. I'll sit up for you."

Bruce reflected as he walked across town that Cora's question had been illuminating. That was why she had fallen in with Clarence's plan: it would rid her of a rival. She had no faculty for thinking farther than that. What the absent mother would be to the hopeless, suffering son, she could not comprehend. He thought of himself five years earlier and the flash of keen light that a gesture had thrown upon his life—upon all life. . . .

His mother opposed his marriage—this particular marriage. "Cora is not the girl for you, Bruce," she wrote. "Won't you believe that I know my son better than he knows himself? Or perhaps you think I am letting something stand in the way of my desire for your happiness? Don't think that, Bruce. I cannot think it myself—can find no reason to think it. Don't you see, Bruce, that you are only a child, a little boy who has never had any time to play? One can't go through life without a play-time. Well, a man can't. A woman's ordeals start so early and last so long, she has hardly ever any time to think of play. You'll want to play, Bruce, and the prayer of my heart is that you get a chance to play freely and innocently. When that need comes, my dear son, you won't be able to play if you are married to Cora."

He didn't understand what she meant by a need to play. Life was a serious business, a task requiring all one's attention, all of one's most earnest and deliberate attention. He was

still too young to relax, too young to sense the power of tranquillity. It did not occur to him that the sun, standing dominantly motionless, forever quickened the universe.

With serious zest, he married and brought his bride home. Through a misunderstanding as to the time of the train's arrival there was no one at the station to meet them. Their spirits were not daunted and through the bright June sunshine, they walked home, carelessly happy. Just opposite a stone church, with its entrance bowered in roses, they saw his mother and sister coming to meet them. As his mother saw and recognized them, she half turned her back, as though this physical evidence of her loss were unbearable. Bruce stopped short, agonizingly blinded by the glare of that movement. In that instant he saw into his mother's heart, depth within depth, brilliantly illuminated. He saw, transfigured there, renunciation, struggling faith, dying hope, brooding despair, pain and regret and sacrifice. Over all, intertwined and veiling all, was love, a calm, sure passion, quieting the tumult in a distracted soul. These things were presented to him, not as in a vision, but palpable, real, vital—figures of life standing at his mother's side. Within him there was a fierce strife of emotions that, quieting, left him looking with new eyes upon a new world. It was as though he had experienced some permanent devastating change. So fleeting was the cause of the catastrophe, that Cora noticed nothing. Obviously, she was not traveling the road to Damascus.

Not once during the five years that had passed since that home-coming had his mother, by word or look, reproached him. Not once had she voiced a criticism of Cora. Not for an instant had the affection she gave each of them wavered. She had buried her cross and she was not of the stuff that sets about profitless deep digging.

IV

HE sat on an ottoman at her feet. It had been one of her good days. The fiend that gnawed, destructively, at her stomach, had momentarily quieted himself. They had talked of her trip East. She was going, Clarence had said, in a few days. She was without enthusiasm. “If you and Clarence think it best,” she said. Her tone was neither hopeless nor expectant. How much she knew of her real condition, it was impossible to guess. The lump had worried her until they told her it was an enlargement of the pancreatic gland. Did she credit their statement? They never knew.

She was running her hand through Bruce’s tangled hair.

“What are you thinking, mother?”

“Of how bright you were as a baby—I mean how good-natured. I was happy before you were born. It was one of your father’s best periods. They said that was the reason.”

“I’m glad I wasn’t too much trouble.”

“No one in the world could be kinder or more considerate than he. . . . Just then he had given up carrying his knife. That always frightened me, though it went on for years. . . . We had a comfortable Ohio log cabin. It was a good house—you needn’t be ashamed of your birthplace.”

“I’m not, foolish. . . . Tell me more about the knife. Why did father carry it?”

“Sometime, not now. . . . It started before I knew him. There were people in Virginia who hated him. Everyone did hate him—unless they loved him . . .”

“Did many love him?”

“I’m trying to think. It seems as though everyone did, but of course they didn’t. But no one was indifferent. . . . He couldn’t have endured that . . . I suppose he was vain. Some men are.”

“Now, now, you needn’t rub it in.” The kind hand went on combing his hair and she smiled at him.

“I remember Osborne. That was while you were a baby. He came and talked to me. He was a rich farmer. He told me, weeping, that he would do anything in the world for your father—anything. If he would stop drinking. That was all he asked. ‘The rest will take care of itself,’ he said. He thought your father a great surgeon. Others thought so too. . . . Well, I mean, John Osborne loved him. Wouldn’t you say so?”

“I wonder why, mother. . . . Mother, did John Osborne love you?”

“Oh, dear, no. I think he rather resented me; as though he felt he could have managed your father if I hadn’t been there in the way—a useless liability.”

“I don’t think much of John Osborne, then.”

The room was pleasantly warm, the motion of her hand lulled him, his taut nerves relaxed, and he leaned comfortably against her knee. He forgot that right at his elbow were a hundred worries—the office with its ceaseless demand that the news be covered; his brother, unimaginative, stricken with a sense of duty; his wife, querulous in her

condition of semi-invalid, brooding upon herself as forsaken, misunderstood. Forgot, even, that he was sitting at the feet of a dying mother.

"Your good nature lasted a long time."

"It's all gone now."

"Your play was broken off suddenly. . . . It was so easy to amuse you. A pair of scissors and some paper and you'd sit for an hour, contentedly cutting away. . . . I wonder what on earth you thought you were doing. No one could ever guess. Your father was sure it meant you'd be a surgeon."

"I'm still at it. You should see me at the office. It meant I'd be a City Editor and add a paste pot to the scissors and paper."

"I thought it was only the child's instinct to destroy, but your Aunt Mary said it was the instinct to be free—that you were cutting a way out. . . . That sounded far-fetched then but now I don't know. . . ."

"Nonsense. It was only the crude rhythm of the moving blades and the falling paper that interested me. I'd have been just as keenly amused by a swinging pendulum. . . ." The hand had ceased its caressing motion and was lying still on the arm of her chair. "But you're tired, mother. It's time for bed."

"Yes, I've been up all day. I felt so well."

"Now, you're not to do that. You know the doctor said——"

"Oh, I've had enough of doctors in my time. I know how much attention to pay to them. But I am tired. Will you stay or——"

"No, Cora's alone."

"Oh, then, you've stayed too long. You'll come over tomorrow if you're not too tired? You look tired all the time lately. You're worried. Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. And don't worry about Cora. She's young and well. See that she walks. Don't let her stay in doors and be an invalid. She'll need her strength. . . . I guess that's enough advice for one time. Good-night."

She held his face between her hands, peering into his troubled eyes.

"You seem like a baby tonight. Helpless, a little pain in its tummy and no way of telling what's wrong. Don't try to tell. You'll be easier. There must be a wise Doctor somewhere who doesn't need words."

V

AS Bruce walked home, the wind seemed less boisterous. His mother's influence lingered, robbing the elements of their power to harass. He was reflecting, his imagination lulled to rest. . . . He had seemed like a baby to her. He seemed so to himself. There was nothing upon which he could fasten and say, This I know. Nothing. Once he had known—how many things! At twenty he had solved all of life's problems; could check them off with demonstrations, Q.E.D., glibly. Even the purpose of life had appeared rationally obvious. He had drunk at Carlyle's fountain: The answer was work. He was prepared for that. He was determined to evidence his existence without having read Schopenhauer; he was ready to be ruthless though ignorant of Nietzsche. He had eliminated miracles and God before he opened Hume. He was colossal in the ignorant egotism of twenty.

All of those things which he had known so thoroughly had slipped from him. As he neared thirty, it was tragic to discover that his ignorance increased. He could prove nothing. The winds had blown away the froth. The hard, bitter, unanswerable rocks shone in a strange light. Century after century the waves of men washed up against them, broke and disappeared and the rocks remained unsolved. He, in his turn, was beating upon them. The superfluous luggage of twenty was torn away. Only the shreds of a half-formed philosophy clung to him; these, too, must go. Then in utter nakedness he would sprawl on that destroying shore, seeking to catch, above the roar of the breakers, the echo of that anthem which the stars sang when the world was young.

Thus he reflected, being still a child, too recently from his mother's arms for independent thought. He was still a sophomore—that is to say, still incapable of thinking. Not incapable of suffering: even the midge may have its pain. But he was old enough to feel the nakedness thus imaged; he was approaching self-consciousness.

Beneath this strain of semi-lucid reflection, ran an irritation, slowly forcing itself into recognition. At first he could not guess its source. Then he realized: He was nearing home—and Cora. At one time he had traveled many miles, in great eagerness, to be near her. Once, when, after their marriage, they had been briefly separated, he had sworn that, having her back, he would never let her out of his arms. Never. Not for an instant. Without her he was empty. She fulfilled him, made his existence rational. Why? She was a beatific source whence he drew meaning, a coalescence that knitted him into an entity. Without her he fell apart, broke away bit by bit, became worthless débris. She was celestial, impelling him upward, forcing a triumph over feet of clay. Yes, there had been such a time.

Whence the change? Who had plucked the wings from that seraphic creature? Who had opened his eyes—or were they now blinded? The time had come when he could think dispassionately of her as a mildly pretty woman, with large brown eyes and a weak chin. And she? What did she now think of him? What had she formerly thought? Had she, too, passed through the awakening fires? Was that searing baptism inevitably part of marriage? Once there had been suggestions that she expected great things of him—vague, but great.

He grew hot at the thought that he had, certainly, yielded no greatness. He had lighted no torch to throw an obscuring shadow around his feet of clay: They must be rankly apparent, those primordial hoofs. She would fasten her eyes on them and sign herself to resignation.

Hell! It was he, then, who had shattered the glory, plucked the wings, immured an angel. Hell and corruption! He was the black spot in the midst of his sunshine. The thing he had been hating was his own shadow. Eternal damns! Naturally, she had remained unchanged. He had grown coarse and indifferent. No longer inclined to see beauty, blindness had crept upon him. Good God, how could she endure him! He must regenerate himself. Go back, go back—no, step ahead, do something, be something. A life of devotion was not too much to compensate her for so hideous a betrayal.

He stood still, facing the wind that swept down Sixteenth Street, overwhelmed by a sense of his failure. His humiliation enveloped him, permeated him, filled him. It did not matter that he laid no finger upon tangible evidence of baseness, that he called to mind no act of infidelity or harshness. His self-aversion drove him to pile cruelty upon indifference, stupidity upon grossness. He saw himself vile, shameful, atrocious, sinister, hellish! He cringed beneath the blows he dealt himself, but he endured them. He was a flagellant, and his blood must pay for his sins.

It would be absurd to call him insincere. His sincerity was rampant. Every husband, touched with imagination, will understand this. It is the ordeal through which men pass in an effort to regain a lost paradise. Not once but often, not in youth only but in maturity, do they seek thus to exorcise the masculine devils.

Whence comes it? It is the unconscious humility of the father before the mother, a deep admission that man is less in the scheme of the universe than woman. It is weakness paying tribute to strength; it is vanity yielding to selfishness; it is the devoured supplicating the devourer.

Bruce understood none of this. Hence his conviction of sin and his bitter self-laceration. He stumbled forward, exhausted by the passionate turmoil. He quickened his steps, he broke into a run. He was in senseless haste to throw himself at her feet, to weep out his entreaties, his assurances, to rekindle the flame, to re-establish the glory.

He found Cora in the Morris chair, reading. She had taken down her hair and it hung down her shoulders in two long plaits, one over either breast. She had undressed and a bath robe covered her nightgown. Her ankles were bare, her feet thrust into bedroom slippers. She looked up at him.

“Is your mother worse?”

“No. Cora, I——”

“You look terrible. . . . You’ve been a long time.”

“I ran in my rush to get here. . . . Cora——”

“Where’ve you been? Surely not there—all this time.”

“Every minute. Though I may have been some time on the way home. I don’t know. You see, I got to thinking——”

“Of course. You can think of everything under the sun except me. I can sit up half the night here alone, and keep busy waiting for you, while you gallivant around the streets. It doesn’t matter. . . . I’m going to bed. You better go, too—from the way you look. . . .”

Thus have women, from the beginning of time, dashed the high hopes of men. Embracing within themselves the ends of all things mortal, they are blind to the flashes of an infinity that lies without them. Do not look to them for an hierarchy that ends in an Oversoul. The Marys bear sons, but it is from the sons that the revelation comes, it is they who are laid upon the cross, it is upon their brows that the drops of blood appear, from their hearts that the prayer for mercy rises. Man in his soul is unmated. In his ideals and in his aspirations, mean and slime-coated though they are, he is without female companionship. When he sets out for the mountain top, whence to view all the wonders of the world, he must understand that the companion of his bed will remain at home. . . .

VI

BRUCE, as City Editor of *The Tribune*, was in charge of both the evening and morning editions. Of the latter he had only general supervision, but to the former he gave his entire day. Brokaw, small, red-headed and capable, was the news editor, the hopper through which all the grist passed before it appeared in print. Charles Hamblin, managing editor, was a careful, methodical Englishman of sound judgment. "The only safe place around a newspaper office is the wastepaper basket," was his axiom.

There was a staff of ten or twelve reporters, besides those engaged on the society columns, the sports page, the drama with Dr. Storrs at its head, the humorous column on the editorial page, written by Miss Thomas, the Tommy to whom Cora had referred. There was a city of three hundred thousand to cover and, in addition, the state capitol at St. Paul. That is to say, Bruce, with little experience and less aptitude, had a man's-size job. An accident, tragic in its denouement, had brought him the place.

When Bruce joined the staff, John Buttman was City Editor, a man of genius for the work, but ill-suited to Hamblin's temperament. Hamblin was fond of saying, "I don't want any brilliant men on this staff. I want a dependable plodder, who won't change the name of the paper after I go home at night." In time Buttman was sent to Chicago as special correspondent, and Billy Dowell was put in his place. Bruce at that time was night city editor, that is, Buttman's assistant.

Dowell was cleverness taking a man's shape. His memory was prodigious and unimpaired by his long periods of drunkenness. He knew everybody in town and thus possessed unrivaled sources of information. He was a clear, capable news writer, lending to his briefest stories a touch of the charm that characterized his personality. Bruce was delighted at the opportunity of working with him, of learning his trade from a master.

Dowell was mysterious. His home address did not appear in the list of employees. When asked for it, he flatly refused and spent half a day storming around the office, calling upon all the gods to witness that he was a free American citizen and he'd be double damned if he'd surrender any of his rights. He gave his time to the job, more than was required, and his work was satisfactory, wasn't it? What difference did it make where he lived?? He lived where he damned well pleased. He'd give his address or not give it as suited him, and it suited him not to give it. They could like it or lump it. The fact that no one else had refused to give his address, only sharpened his rage. If the others wanted to be a pack of cringing curs, let 'em; he was a free American citizen, by all the saints in hell, and he'd stand on that prerogative.

Neither his address nor telephone number appeared in the office book. He would be seen occasionally at the theatre accompanied by a pretty, blue-eyed little creature, who, because of her infrequent appearances on the stage, was recognized as Bessie Quirk. It was understood that there was a Mrs. Dowell somewhere, over in Wisconsin or back in the state—the information was vague and she remained an unreality. No one had the temerity to question Billy, and the mystery behind which he shielded himself lasted his life out.

Bessie was a step-daughter, and to old man Quirk a rare and delicate creature to be protected, at all cost, from life's black realities. One of the black realities was Billy Dowell. He had, perhaps, heard of the mythical Mrs. Dowell and resented his step-daughter's interest in a married man. He resented it one Sunday evening to the extent of shooting a hole in Dowell's head, while Bessie stood at the side of the murdered man. Later he told a jury that Billy had threatened him and he had shot in self-defence, believing himself in danger of great bodily harm. The jury accepted his plea, and he was sent to Stillwater for fifteen years.

Mrs. Dowell manifested reality and appeared, with a daughter, to claim the body of her husband. She was a quiet, serious, hard-working woman to whom Billy's "flare" must have been dazzling—until it became bitter.

Thus a revolver in the hands of a paranoiac advanced Bruce. It was not a place he coveted. He had little experience of running a desk, directing a staff, and in his heart he hated newspaper work. It was not the goal upon which his eyes had been set. As he went fiercely through his work, cursing it, maltreating it, he remembered other ambitions. . . .

He was eighteen, blatantly eighteen, and the dust of the small southern Minnesota town in which Clarence had learned his trade blew into his eyes. He was on his way to meet Ellen. She came to him, slight, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, straight-nosed, full lipped, seventeen and bewilderingly beautiful. They went on across the flat prairies, hand in hand, full of innocent talk—the essence of romance.

"Bruce, what will we do—sometime?"

"Have a home of our own and never be parted, Ellen."

"Prosy: what will we do,—what will *you* do? You won't always teach a country school, will you?"

He threw back his head and sent his laugh flying into the spring air.

"Ridiculous! Of course not. I'm 'bout through with that life now. It's no work for a man. Don't you know what I'm goin' to do? I supposed you did. I've spoken so often about it. . . . I'm going to write books—that's what."

"Oh, Bruce. Can you?"

"Certainly I can. But look here, Ellen, you don't doubt it, do you?"

"Not if you say so, Bruce."

"That's good. I just about couldn't stand your doubtin' it. Why, you of all people ought to be sure of it."

"Me?—I don't see why."

" 'Cause I've talked so much to you. I tell you everything."

"Oh." Then the eternal housewife became provident. "But can you make any money at that, Bruce?"

"It'll be slow, probably. May take me six months or a year to get started, but we'll manage somehow until they start buyin'."

So that was his ambition. Ellen turned it over in her mind. This flaming, clear-eyed youth at her side seemed capable of anything, even of starving. But she was dubious. Her father was a retired farmer who provided his family with comforts and rustic luxuries, and she had no desire to face poverty, even with this strange creature who allured and

confused.

"I don't see how it will work out, Bruce."

"Ellen, you aren't to doubt," he cried sharply. "Not ever." He was trembling with passion.

She laid her hand, in a frightened gesture, on his arm. "I don't, Bruce, I don't. But we have to plan, don't we?"

So slight and so beautiful, with the quick tears shining in her blue eyes, the bluest of things blue; so intensely alive and so soon to pass silently through the dark door into the vast Beyond Life. Had he but known, how much more quickly and how much more completely would he have forgiven her! Strange how sensitive grows the mind in the vicinity of one's vanity! He could not instantly wholly forgive. Still it was a passing cloud and, enlightened by a sharp experience, Ellen paid tribute to his future greatness.

Only a few brief months remained to her. . . . A crude, bald letter reached him in the remote district where he taught his last term in a country school. At the words he read, he was emptied of emotion. Within, he was stone-cold. He had had no word of her sickness. Now she was dead. That meant her hand would never again lie in his. He would never again see her, hear her, sense her in all his being. She was dead. Dead people were cold, creepy. . . .

As a child he had gone with his mother to a cabin in which a little old Irish woman lay dead. "Put your hand on her forehead, Bruce," his mother directed. He had done so. For days the sensation lingered in his hot fingers. "Why did you have him do that?" a woman asked his mother. "It will show him the difference between life and death."

Between life and death: He was alive, and Ellen—It was impossible to continue the day's work. He dismissed the pupils, and they went out hushed, looking back over their shoulders at his white face, slinking away from something dreadful, incomprehensible.

The fire died down, the room grew cold. He shivered in the midst of his arid immensity. What did he think? Nothing. He hardly felt. He was emptied of sensation. He put on his cap and coat and went outdoors. A January sun shone upon him, reflected blindingly from the wide expanse of white snow. He stumbled home, got out his pony and rode away. Anywhere, nowhere. Mile after mile the tireless horse, wet with sweat, plunged ahead.

Slowly thought returned to him. His first sensation was of rage. He raised his head and shook his whip at the universe, cursing all things—a midge hurling anathema at creation. Then he lashed his pony and went forward swiftly. Beneath the blows of Destiny, rage cannot persist. Passion left him. He checked his horse to a walk and slumped in the saddle, beaten, destroyed. Now his agony was supreme—he was hopeless. He passed from blackness to blackness, a gloom impenetrable, in the midst of which he could no longer see Ellen, slight, bewitching.

His fine dream had fallen to bits. Life, like a great cracked bell, clanged harshly in his ears, a meaningless tumult, an insane uproar. Crash upon crash, hammering out his soul. . . . From somewhere, through the deafening clamor, there came a faint, true note. Slowly it caught his attention. It was as someone standing at his side, whispering comfort. He raised his head to listen. There was no voice, but there was the prompting of an instinct, and he heeded it. In the midst of the lonely, snow-covered plain, he threw himself

upon God. It was, perhaps, inevitable that he should do so. His early training reasserted itself. His religious feeling had been casual but it had survived. It came now full-grown, panoplied, powerful. It sustained, quieted, restored reason. He had drunk the dregs and—found a jewel in the bottom of the cup. . . .

To say that henceforth, for a time, he was religious would be to underestimate his power of devotion. His faith suffused him, colored every thought—was part of him, night and day. He abandoned the idea of writing great books. He would don the cowl and the cassock; he could minister to a world indifferent to the tenderness of Christ, the glory of an all-wise Creator. He would be the word in the midst of Babel. Obviously, his religion had not banished his conceit.

It passed, as such youthful frenzies always pass, but it served its purpose: It dragged him through the quagmire of his first grief. But that first grief had a long-enduring effect. It drew him closer to his mother and revealed to him her necessities. Hence it drove him into new channels. Though his ambition to write books did not die, it abrogated the throne and set salary to reign in its place. It might be seen, indeed, that it had directed his steps into his present distasteful, much worse than distasteful, employment. . . .

Why should his imagination slumber in the presence of a great newspaper? He was a creator, and a paper, in its ephemeral character, was born to be destroyed. It was built on quicksands. The lathe that produced it might be interesting; the product was rubbish. Yet he was chained there with scarcely more freedom than the slave at the bar. Resenting his captivity, he strove for expression in new and unexpected ways. The machine bore him down. “We want sensation, not hysterics,” Hamblin told him dryly, laying his finger bluntly upon the weakness of his City Editor, who balked at nothing for effect, who even in his sanest moments, was careless of his public with the crude carelessness of the intensely individual man. Perhaps it became a game with Hamblin—this contest with his Editor. Though often thwarted, he was never discouraged. He would say:

“If you didn’t know better, I’d let you go at once. But you do. You know as well as I how a paper should be run. My job is to see that you run it that way.”

These conflicts lent zest to a job that rapidly tended to become routine, to sink into a groove, submerging personality. If Bruce had remained single in his concentration, this friendly strife might have gone on for years, the paper and the public reaping the benefit. His wife’s condition and his mother’s fatal illness destroyed his application. He gave to the office his time—his mind was elsewhere. He followed Hamblin’s directions—he sank to a nonentity.

VII

AT the same time, he was appalled at the thought of failure. He had no resources except his salary. At first that had seemed large. Now it was shrunk to a pitiful inadequacy. The new expenses devoured it; it vanished. If he lost his place, destitution yawned. A horrifying thought to him who knew the meaning of that terrible word. He knew, he had learned early. The scar would last his life out. . . .

He was a child, riding in a covered wagon on the road from Kansas to Minnesota. Rain fell ceaselessly. It beat on the canvas covering, oozed through, dripped through, poured through. There was only here and there a dry spot. It seemed as though it had rained for days, for ever. Perhaps not. Time is long to children.

His father, the big man with a full beard, a wide-rimmed, black hat, and a pipe in his mouth, sat on the spring seat beside Bruce's mother. The rain fell more violently. His father cursed. "Damn and damn the rain. Hell light upon the mud. The distilled curse of Christ blight the damned state."

His mother spoke. "You're getting wet, father. Sit back and try and keep dry."

"How in hell can I sit back and see where the damned team's going?"

"You needn't curse all the time."

"This rain would make all the saints in hell curse."

"May be. But the children wouldn't hear them."

"What? I'll skin him alive if I hear one of 'em utter an oath. I will, by God. You remember that, you back there." He turned his face over his shoulder to emphasize his words with a look. The eyes were light blue and kind, belying the fierceness of his threat. The nose was straight, the features firm, the countenance dignified, though alert. All the children thought him handsome and idolized him, but fled from the blast of his temper. Who had set the mark of Ishmael on the brow of this strange, superior man? No one knew; but he went up and down the ways of the world, lugging his family and a few old classics with him. He had Tacitus and Livy, Josephus and Plutarch and a ragged copy of *Tristram Shandy* that none of the children was permitted to look at. He was aloof yet tender; disdainful of, and indifferent to, his responsibilities as husband and father, yet tenacious in his affections; he was solitary, yet wretched when alone. He was a pioneer without endurance, an explorer without purpose. In a word, he was a nomad, and his migrations were as certain as the turn of the seasons.

They were rolling down a steep, slippery clay hill in Nebraska and the team, a mule and a horse, required his attention. The mule was a good animal—at times, but true to racial instincts, it abominated mud. Its small hooves gave it slight support and benumbing panic seized it when that upon which it set its feet yielded beneath it.

"That's a bad looking mud hole, father. Can't you drive around it?"

"Do you think I'm going to lay out roads in this cursed state? Others have gone through that hell hole, and I reckon we can."

"Not with a mule, may be."

“That’s a damned good mule. I wouldn’t trade him—Hi, there get up, get up, get up, oh, hell and damnation, get up. There by the eternal flat-eyed God, I hope you’re satisfied now.”

The mule was down in the mud, as mules have gone down in mud since the coming of the first hybrid. To a mule the temptation to lie down in mud is irresistible. Perhaps he doesn’t try to resist. At any rate, his indecision is brief. He goes down instantly, completely, finally, eternally. He lies down as one who is never more to rise. It is supreme negation. He just lies down. He doesn’t flounder or roll. He lies still. If he had a cud he’d chew it. He is content. He has returned to his original element. He gives every evidence of having decided that, while the world stands, there he will remain.

Again and again the long-lashed whip hissed out and at each blow raised a welt on his side. He never flicked an eyelash nor wobbled an ear. Suffering was the badge of all his tribe and he was the king of stoics. The curses that poured over him in a fiery torrent would have blasted a less resolute animal. They left him unscathed. Then the driver, followed by Harry, his oldest son, climbed out into the rain and attacked the mule bodily. Bruce and Clarence struggled to a vantage point on the back of the seat and, wide eyed, watched the contest. The two enraged men did everything imaginable to that mule. They poured water in his ears. One twisted his tall while the other dragged at the bridle. Their efforts might as well have been directed against the body of a prehistoric mastodon.

Once Harry forgot himself and swore. The attack on the animal was interrupted while the boy was bitterly upbraided for profanity. “If there’s any swearing to be done in this family, I’ll do it,” said Dr. Darton. “Now take hold of that cursed and double damned ass’s nose and twist his head while I larrup him.”

The men, like the mule, were covered with mud—a black, tarry substance that clung to them, plastered them, enveloped them. It was in Dr. Darton’s beard and in Harry’s hair. It caked their hands, it lent grotesque dimensions to their boots, it weighed them down, and their movements were slow, uncertain, like those of one afflicted with locomotor ataxia.

The horse, traveling companion to the obdurate mule, stood knee deep in mud, stolid, patient, passively ready to do his duty. The erratic conduct of his mate neither alarmed nor stunned him. It was impossible, but it was done. He waited.

The father and son, exhausted, at the end of their resources, cleaned themselves as well as possible and climbed back into the wagon.

“What are you going to do now?” asked Mrs. Darton.

“Nothing. Sit here, right here, all the rest of my blighted and condemned natural life.”

“It’s not a very pleasant place to live,” said the mother judicially, looking out upon the downpour. “And besides, someone may come along and want to pass.”

“Let ’em. Let the whole long-eared, double damned world come along. They can wait until that imp of hell starves himself into getting up.”

There was perhaps some magic in the words. The mule shook his head, cast a thoughtful eye upon the weather and got up. There was a shout of joy from the wagon, which died away when the animal, now on his feet, refused to budge. The whip, again brought into play, snapped viciously at the long ears. But the obstinate creature only lowered his head and leaned back as though suggesting that no power on earth could make him go a step further into that mud hole. Dr. Darton took him at his word and, drawing

sharply on the reins, backed the team onto solid ground. He backed the wagon around, turned up the hill down which they had just come and toiled slowly to the top. The afternoon was waning and ice was forming in the wind-driven rain.

In low tones father and mother consulted as to their immediate future. A decision was reached and the team was turned toward Lincoln. A kind farmer gave them shelter in his barn for the night. Darton and Harry sat by the kitchen fire and dried their clothes.

During the night the wind and the rain came down together, violently, but by morning the rain had changed to a fine sleet, sharp like a knife. They set forward early and in the half-light of evening drove into Lincoln. They found, with difficulty, miserable lodgings in a poverty-stricken boarding house. As Mrs. Darton strove to make the family temporarily comfortable, she did not realize that for many long months she was to remain in that wretched house, that there her feet were to go down into the midst of suffering that would make her past experiences seem like the essence of roses.

They had intended to resume their journey the next morning, but when that time arrived the father was too sick to travel. The exposure he had suffered in his conflict with the mule brought on an attack of inflammation of the lungs. For some days he was dangerously ill.

The man who ran the boarding house had found, after the death of his wife, that he had no knack for the business. Seeing a chance to escape, he turned the lease over to Mrs. Darton and went hurriedly away.

The frame building, set flush with the street, was a hideous makeshift of a home. In the front room, which was dining-room and office, the plastering had fallen in great patches from the walls. The floor of cheap pine boards rose and fell drunkenly. The windows, cracked and broken, were mended with rags and newspapers. A sheet-iron stove was expected to warm this sieve against the fury of a Nebraska winter. It was impossible for human beings to live there, yet they lived and, with the exception of Dr. Darton, were well. He recovered of his pneumonia but, possibly, from the mud, had contracted an infection of the eyes that, during all the winter, robbed him of his sight. He was helpless, a dependent upon paupers.

Almost no one patronized the boarding house which Mrs. Darton labored to keep going. Only the outcast, clinging to his last cent, could persuade himself to cross its disreputable threshold. Those who came went away filled with amazement, ministered to, as they were, by a white-haired, white-faced angel, who served them well-cooked food. The experience was devastating. No one returned a second time. The whole thing savored of the supernatural.

In after years Bruce could remember only two or three things that happened during that winter. One was going with his older brother and sister to pick up coal in the railroad yards where there were fights with other ragamuffins for the precious fuel. Occasionally a kind-hearted fireman would fling a shovelful of coal into their yawning bag. But these excursions were not always pleasant. Harry came home one night beaten and disfigured. Bruce heard his sobs and for all the rest of his life he could hear them. Hard, choking, gripping, tearing sobs, pulled out of the young man’s breast by pain and rage. The gang at the yards had set upon him, beaten him, kicked him, choked him, left him half dead. It was horrible. Wretchedness attacking misery, the collective strength overwhelming the stranger. It was life in the raw; it was an expression of the instinct to survive, let who

would die. It was senseless, violent; that is to say, it was the work of a mob.

Nevertheless they lived. The black winter ended and Dr. Darton, recovering, went away. How did he go? Bruce never knew, but he went and Harry with him. Then the worst days fell upon them. Perhaps there had been some money saved, who knows? If so, it was now spent. A grim landlord ousted them, as he had a right to do, from the tumble-down shack in which they had spent the winter. Perhaps they had never paid any rent. He may have been, after all, a kind-hearted man; but his patience or his resources or both were exhausted. They moved into a single room, six of them. Slept and ate there, in one room, ten by twelve. They lived on top of each other—in dirt, in rags, in terror.

No money, no word, came from the father. They starved. Literally. Mrs. Darton, in the presence of children crying for food, put aside her pride. She appealed to the town. The town could not help them. They were strangers, non-residents. There was no provision to feed such as they. Doubtless there were many in Lincoln who would have helped had they known of their distress. They did not know, they had no means of knowing.

The pinch of hunger became harder. That Bruce could remember. There were two days without food, without a scrap, nothing. Every instant Mrs. Darton expected a letter, with money, from her husband. But how long could this go on? Starvation is a slow process, but it is not endless.

At the instant of her keenest despair, Bruce rushed in upon her. He had been seeking food. Where? In the gutter, and he had found a dime! A fortune. It was salvation. Transformed into bread and cheese (a loaf could be had for five cents then), it became a feast, a banquet, a prodigality of food.

The dime from the gutter proved a talisman of good fortune. On the morrow the letter and money arrived. How much? Probably a very small amount. It was enough. It enabled them to leave Lincoln, to find an asylum, again temporary, in northern Iowa. Minnesota was their destination. They were gradually nearing it; once there, their long journeys would be at an end. But not their poverty; that was not to end so quickly; that was to stay with them always; that Bruce still had, a heritage from his improvident father—the nomad born in the wrong hemisphere.

VIII

MILLIE, Bruce's sister, came from her home in Wadena County to accompany her mother East. She was married to Gene Minor and lived on a quite worthless farm, fifteen miles from the nearest town. Gene was no farmer, but he was as nearly a farmer as he was anything else. He was nothing. Good-natured, lazy, improvident, he faced calmly an impossible future, not through stoicism, but simply because his mentality could not understand the darkness that impinged. The youngest son of a woman old when he was born, but who, toothless and incredibly thin, still lived, he expected always to be cared for, protected, made comfortable. He must long since have starved or gone to work, had not his mother possessed a small property, which she handled so shrewdly that the income from it kept the family alive. She was a hard, talkative old woman who spent her days sitting by the kitchen fire nursing a wrist, broken some years before but never rightly mended, and smoking a short, black clay pipe. It was impossible to induce her to smoke anything less objectionable in appearance and odor. The clay stem set well in her hardened gums.

With such a husband and such a mother-in-law, Millie's married life left something to be desired. As a child she had been a spitfire, passing from the extreme of good nature to the extreme of screaming rage in the flash of an eyelash, and running this bewildering gamut of emotion half-a-dozen times an hour. She was impulsively, but whole heartedly, generous and passionately sympathetic. She had the instincts of a lady and the irresponsible temper of a fishwife. Her devotion and her enmity were exuberant, like tropical vegetation. She loved with complete abandon or hated with a bitterness that found relief only in the most envenomed expressions. She was as tactless as Mary Tudor, as candid as Rabelais. She adored George Eliot and held *Romola* as the greatest of all novels. She was a paradox, an anomaly; that is to say, an uncontrolled woman, touched with brains.

At thirty-six her hair was iron gray, the flash of her hazel eyes was subdued, her vivacity had tamed itself. These were the results of ten years' existence with Gene and his mother's clay pipe and garrulity. She was subdued, but undaunted; her head was gray—but unbowed. She could still speak her mind. Surprisingly, she sided with Bruce. This position was against nature. Clarence was her favorite and her judgment always ran with her affection. For once she was lifted out of herself and got a glimpse of the meaning of the treatment proposed for her mother. "Dunce," "born fool," "heartless wretch," were the mildest epithets she applied to Clarence. Her tirade was endless. It was useless. She talked against a stone wall, against a man with a sense of duty. Clarence's attitude under the ordeal reminded Bruce of the mule lying down in the mud. His brother had the same air of determination to stick. Out of breath and unable, at the moment, to lay her tongue to a new opprobrium, Millie ceased, and Clarence again asked his terrifying question:

"You don't want her to be told, do you?"

At that she screamed at Clarence. It was the first touch that seemed genuine to Bruce. It was the old Millie revivified. Now her work became classic, her denunciation was an

epic. No disreputable word or act of Clarence's life escaped. His past was thrown in his face. Splash. A pailful of icy water. It was beyond endurance. Unable to quiet her, Bruce left the room.

When he rejoined them they were at peace. Clarence had won by negative resistance, by lying still in his mud, by saying nothing. Millie was smiling, her eyes dreamy. She was thinking of the Hudson, of the far places in the East—the new life she would see, the strangers she would meet. She was not ill; it was not she who was to undergo horrible treatment. At the last gasp her imagination had failed.

Bruce sighed, realizing that he had held the raveling of a hope and that now the thread had slipped from him. There was something awful to him in the composure with which Clarence looked forward to this experiment. An unfathomable stupidity. Clarence had always been so. Even as a child Bruce had recognized appalling limitations in his brother. . . .

"Why don't you let Bruce go alone, Clarence, if he likes?"

Bruce, already a hundred yards away, heard his mother's question addressed to the brother who had in himself no resources.

" 'Cause I want to go with him."

"But can't you go a way of your own? May be you could find a better patch than Bruce." The quest was for wild strawberries.

"I can't. He might just as well let me go with him."

"You should be the leader, Clarence. You're older than he."

"I ain't."

"Clarence!—Bruce, can't you let Clarence go with you?"

"Sure, mother. But what's the crybaby always got to tag for? Don't he know a feller likes to be alone oncit in a while?"

It was always like that. There were things a feller wanted to think and you couldn't think right if somebody kept talkin' and askin' questions. There were stories a feller wanted to tell himself and you couldn't always be bothered sayin' 'em out loud. They moved quicker just inside you. It was hard to escape the pertinacious Clarence. One could run away from him—he was solid and heavy on his feet, but there wasn't much fun in that because you remembered how he looked and kept wishin' you hadn't run away and so after all couldn't think much.

The day was hot, the berries elusive. The idea for a story with a new heroic rôle for himself occurred to him. If he could get away for a few minutes he could work it out. He strolled off, casually. Deceitfully, he pretended to be looking for berries, but ever he moved farther and farther away, thinking all the time of his new idea.

The vigilant Clarence became suspicious. He had, perhaps, learned by experience.

"Where you goin'?"

"Nowhere. Just lookin'."

"Here's a good patch. Come back here."

"All right." But Bruce continued to edge away.

"Hi, there. You're tryin' to run away from me. You wait now."

Deception having failed, Bruce broke into a run. The next instant he was lying on the ground. Something hard and unexpected had hit him over the ear. He sprang up, but the world had gone crazy and was running around and up and down, agonizingly. He flopped down again. Clarence joined him, a little alarmed at his efficiency but on the whole satisfied, complacent.

"That'll learn you," he said coolly.

"Did you bust me with a rock?"

"Well, what yo' tryin' to run away for? I told yo' 'nough times I'd do it."

Bruce looked at this amazing brother, whose hot, round face was empty of all concern. He could imagine himself, in a rage, heaving a stone, but he went limp at the thought of his horror if the missile accidentally found its objective.

"I got a notion to larrup you good for that."

Clarence wisely drew back. "Yo' better not."

"I would, only you're such a awful fool it wouldn't do no good."

"You know what the Bible says about fool callin'."

"Pooh. The Bible was wrote a awful long time before you was born, or it would have been wrote different." . . .

"I'll go to Chicago with you, and put you on the New York Central," Clarence was saying. "You don't change again. It'll be an easy trip."

"It'll be wonderful," sighed Millie.

The Pioneer Limited left Minneapolis at 7:30 in the evening for its twelve-hour run to Chicago. On that last fateful evening the sky was overcast, but brightened by a moon, hidden or exposed as the wind drove the clouds along. A cab (in Minneapolis in 1908 they called it a hack) stood at the curb, the horses drooping dejectedly at the end of a long day. Within doors there were the hurry and bustle of last-minute preparation. Only Mrs. Darton remained calm. Beneath her widow's bonnet, which she had worn for nearly twenty years, her white face, as yet undrawn by pain, was placid, composed. In that dark moment her thoughts were hidden. What did she feel, what did she hope? Was her going a mere friendly compliance? Had she failed correctly to diagnose her illness? Was she buoyed by expectations of relief or was she, consciously, a martyr to her son's sense of the proper thing to do?

Bruce fought for an appearance of cheerfulness, of confidence, though he knew her clear eyes read his secret thought. He could not face her. She paused in the act of pulling on her gloves to lay her hand on his arm and whisper,

"It's all right, Bruce. Every one will be happier."

He caught the hand feverishly and held it to his cheek, smiling at her. It was the bravest deed of his life.

"Of course. You'll come home right as a daisy."

Her eyes held to his face for a moment; then she sighed as she turned them away. Bruce flushed. It was as though in that final minute she had looked to him for candor, for heroic truth—and he had failed her.

The ceremony of departure was, for Bruce, like the last rites and sacrament. She was alive and strong, yet he was assisting at her burial. She spoke to him while he was in the

act of hurling earth upon her coffin. She would die a thousand deaths and he was powerless to save her one agony. . . . In a moment she would leave the room, descend, enter the cab, drive away, vanish. It would be too late. It was already too late. He looked at his brother who was hurrying the departure. He was invincible, unmoved, flushed with self-approval. Millie fluttered, excited. Her eyes shone. She was enjoying herself. Cora was there, agitated, aimlessly helpful, frightened. There was something terrifying in Bruce's eyes. She dreaded the moment when they should be alone. Yet she wanted Mrs. Darton to go. She thought Clarence entirely in the right. But her nerves were beyond her control. She passed anxiously from one to another. She picked up parcels without motive and laid them down without heeding what she did. She was not thinking: She was only alarmed. At what? At nothing, at every thing.

Clarence called out, standing at the door, a grip in either hand, "All ready, folks?"

They were ready. Millie dashed in from the bedroom, her nose white with powder; she screamed something about a package that must not be left behind. Cora was talking, they were all talking. It was a babel in Bruce's ears, they were a constantly moving blur before his eyes. His mother put her arms around him. Her lips were on his. Her lips were warm and soft, full of life, gentle, caressing. He clung to them. They moved to his cheeks, they were pressed against his closed eyes, they rested on his forehead, they came again to his lips. They moved away. He had already told his sister good-by. Now he shook hands with his brother. They went out, Bruce following. They entered the black vehicle. A handkerchief fluttered, a white face was turned to him. The horses' hoofs, iron shod, rapped the stones; the wheels rattled; the cab dwindled, turned the corner, disappeared. Sinister effacement!

Bruce, leaning his head against the corner of the house, wept. His soul, lacerated, sobbed out its pain.

Cora put her arms around him. "Dear Bruce," she whispered.

He cried to her fiercely, "Go in, go in. I'm all right."

She withdrew her hand, hurt, bewildered, and entered the house.

IX

WHAT was this turmoil through which he passed? It was threefold. From that moment he thought of his mother as dead, and he thought of her as passing through untold miseries before she died, and he was torn with fierce regret at his lack of kindness in the past. He despaired, yet he raged and his rage was wasted. He was in the midst of a wild life and he was alone. With what tenacity he had clung to his mother only a youngest son can realize.

The thought that she would not return, that he would never again see her alive, did not occur to him. That instant her dissolution was complete. She had wholly withdrawn herself out of his life. He had rested upon her as upon a firm rock in a raging sea. Without warning, the rock had sunk. He was tossed and buffeted; and these first desperate blows were but the prelude to long years of unsheltered abuse. These pains were compounded in part of vanity and self-pity: the bases for most grief.

Still he was not wholly absorbed in his own loss. He had somehow the feeling of the son who saw his mother dragged forth by the inquisition. He knew, in general, the methods employed by this eastern quack—plasters externally applied to draw the malignant growth out of the body, through stomach walls, flesh and skin. It was horrible. It was impossible; yet with acutest torture it was attempted. He writhed. His body was racked and twisted. It was maddening. It was beyond the power of reason to endure.

Exhausted, he sank to the ground. His sobs became controllable, ceased. Little by little the noises of the night came back to him. Over on Hennepin Avenue the yellow steel-gated cars clanged. The raucous cry of the automobiles split the darkness. The wind moaned through the trees and sighed around the house. The clouds had piled heavily and only a soft diffused light came from the moon, in the midst of which the street lamps shone garishly, disillusioning.

He sat on the door step, his head in his hands, waiting. For what? For that which, during all the rest of his life, would never return to him. For her who had completed him, given him symmetry, justified him. He might be turned into stone, like Niobe, and sit there for a thousand years but the solace of her love would not again tranquilize him.

He forgot Cora, who, within, was waiting impatiently. She had set the room to rights, she had put on her coat. She was ready to go. She did not understand his tragedy, hence she was annoyed. Each instant her irritation increased. “One would think his mother was already dead,” she thought. It was irrational. She stepped to the door. “Bruce!” she called sharply. He rose at once. “Are we to stay here all night?”

“Has it been long? I’m sorry. Let’s go.”

Cora switched off the lights and came out. As they walked away Bruce looked back. The house was black, foreboding. The window where she had stood night after night to wave him a final kiss was blank. He shuddered and Cora snatched her arm away from him. She resented the acuteness of his imagination—for a long time, perhaps always, had resented it. If so, at one period she had dissembled. . . .

He and Cora were walking through the pine woods, near her home in Hubbard County

—close to the source of the Mississippi. Beneath their feet was spread a thick carpet of needles and cones. Above them the giant trees moaned and sighed because of their great age. From far away came the demented laugh of a loon, that appalling sound that curdles the nerves. An old "nester," bent nearly double and moving slowly, appeared, crossed their line of vision, vanished.

A moment later Bruce had assumed a similar attitude. He leaned far forward, his face drawn, his hands crooked, deformed. Upon his back was laid a burden of great pain. It was frightful.

"Oh, Bruce, Bruce, what is it?"

He recovered himself as one coming from a deep sleep. With difficulty he regained a normal position. He flexed his fingers to relieve the strain. "That old man," he said. "I got to thinking how it would seem if one were like that."

She put her arms around him, holding him close and murmured, "You make yourself suffer so! . . ."

They were on First Avenue South, passing a church. A man was at work on the roof. A rope fastened to a belt around his waist seemed, at that distance, a mere thread suspending him over destruction. Bruce, white-faced, clung to the palings of the fence.

"Bruce! What is it? Are you ill?"

Dumbly he shook his head. Following the direction of his fixed stare, she saw the man and understood. "Bruce, I do wish you'd stop being silly. The man isn't going to fall and if he did it wouldn't hurt you. You aren't a child and this is pure affectation. It's tiresome. If you had a little more imagination, you'd understand that it's not very nice for me. . . ."

He was too exhausted to notice her gesture of removal, of disdain at his unconscious shudder as he looked back at his mother's window. They walked on in silence. Consciously he expected nothing from her. She could be deeply sympathetic, but the need must be obvious. She could be tender but she had no faculty for sustaining that emotion. Protracted suffering irritated her, like a personal affront. Her favorite brother Frank had died following an attack of typhoid fever. He had been a long time dying and his pains had worn him to a skeleton. His condition had tormented Bruce, but Cora, when not indifferent, was annoyed. When he died, she was heartbroken. . . .

Beneath his consciousness, he longed for something—a word, an attitude of mind—a hint of harmony. He was too dulled to be aware of discord, but it lay sharply on deep nerves. It was the moment of a crisis in their lives; but neither realized it, not then. Not until long afterwards did Bruce get a glimpse of the significance of his profound loneliness in that hour. Doubtless to Cora it remained ever an irritation, a part of the emotional silliness that was Bruce. Nevertheless, their steps had drawn apart and they were not again to go forward as one person.

X

EARLY in January, Bruce's son was born. He experienced none of the traditional exaltation of the father when he beheld the infant. Had it come upon him unexpectedly his reaction might have been truer to the novelist's idea. His reception of his son had been marred by Cora's attitude. She had insisted upon his presence during her ordeal. She would accept the chloroform from no hand but his. He stood at the head of her bed with the cone in his hand and gave her the kindly fumes at the doctor's directions. . . . When her son lay in the crook of her arm, she sighed shudderingly and was at peace. . . .

Bruce had witnessed the tragedy and the miracle of birth. Like other men, he cried out against the pain of it. Nature was a miser who parted with a wee fragment of life at the price of great suffering. She was a ruthless monster who sought to destroy in the moment of creating. She was a fiend who gave happiness only to inflict misery. He thought only of Cora. His son was a blind, feebly crying creature of no importance, red, misshapen, ugly. Cora, with her white face lying against the pillow, framed with two dark braids of hair, was very beautiful. He yearned over her. She had agonized and he had suffered with her. She had passed through shadow after shadow and he had followed blindly. She had parted with life and lived. It was overwhelming.

She had done all of this thoughtlessly, heedlessly, in response to an instinct. Ignorantly she had gone down into the shadow of the valley and ignorantly she had come forth. She had advanced without anticipation; she had accomplished without vision. The Great Mother had laid her finger upon her brow. She had fulfilled her destiny.

What, to Bruce, was this event that had transpired before his eyes, to the completion of which he was a stranger? It was part of him, yet it was remote. It was an actuality but it remained unreal. It was a symbol but he knew not of what. It was a revelation that blinded. It was mysterious, stupendous, foreboding. It left him flat, his face in the dust, while a Voice spoke to him out of the whirlwind. He had assisted at the creation of a Man; his passion had been thus frightfully consummated. He was not exalted. He despaired, and sought refuge in the consciousness of his own ignorance. . . .

Life settled down around him. He had passed through two crises and he was emptied of emotion. He gave himself to his work in a bitter effort to retrieve the blunders and shortcomings of the past few months.

"You've been damned decent during this spell," he told Hamblin. "I've been a rotten City Editor. I'll make up for it. Everything is over now, and I can give my mind to the job."

He tried, seriously, to keep his promise, to make up for it. He threw himself into his work, but the results were not proportionate to the energy expended. He had lost his nerve —there was no longer any "kick" in his effort. He could give the office only an imitation zest. Life had gone dull and inane. The reaction was natural, the diagnosis simple. He was as a boxer overtrained: he was stale. The months had drained his nerves of vitality, robbed him of acuteness. This he did not understand and looked upon himself as a failure,

miscast, unfitted for his work. Fitted for what work he could not conceive. With a dependent wife and son he clung to his desk, striving by main effort to make up for the lost fire.

He fell ill. The blood left his face; his eyes were two holes in a blanket, his movements were listless, retarded by pain. He wasted away daily while the abdominal disease wore him down. He could not give up, go to bed, cease worrying and get well. No; or at least he thought he could not do this. He went every day to the office, toiling over the assignment book, wading through mountains of copy, dragging his weakened body into the composing room, with an eye to the appearance of late news.

Cora, occupied with her baby and full of a fast-returning strength, hardly noticed his condition. The change had been gradual and she attributed it to a neurotic brooding for his mother. Hence his health was not a topic upon which she could think reasonably or talk calmly.

One February day, after the last form had gone to press, Hamblin came to him.

"Go home, Bruce," he said, "and stay there until you get well. You're in no condition to work. Don't worry about your job," he added kindly. "We'll take care of that for you."

Bruce, too weak to protest, dragged himself home, to bed. Dr. Wanous was sent for. He suspected typhoid but the blood tests did not reveal that disease. He put his patient on a liquid diet and ordered him to remain quiet. The treatment proved effective. In a few days he was greatly improved and returned to work, but he had no joy in renewed health. The letters from Millie and Mrs. Darton accounted for that. They were studied and subdued screams from the torture chamber. In spite of patient restraint, they were sufficient to wrap him in a flaming bath. In the presence of this suffering, the gathering of news, the distribution of pitiful scandals to a poor little world of morons, the passing on of the weak words of politicians, the recital of wrecks, robberies and murders, seemed a poor business, maintained by fools for idiots. This is not the attitude of mind that characterizes the successful City Editor.

With Clarence, who served as one of his reporters, Bruce had little conversation. Not once, during that black winter, did they speak to each other of the absent mother. Bruce voiced no criticism and Clarence made no defense. In his heart, Bruce realized that their ways had parted. They might meet with outward cordiality, but underneath there would be violent misunderstanding. It was plain that Clarence regarded his brother as something inhuman, a monster who could calmly watch a mother's death and do nothing to save her. That was his attitude. It was the attitude of the self-righteous, of him who could see his duty and do it, to whom the hands on the clock meant nothing but a sign of the hours of the day.

It was no mean struggle that raised Bruce above bitterness towards this brother. He forgave him because he came to understand him. He understood him so well that their complete separation was revealed to him. Here he recognized no blood relationship. They could meet as men of the world, whose inner selves never touched. This discovery served further to isolate him. It was the exaggeration of youth and egotism that made him seem, to himself, desolatingly alone. No matter. His loneliness was as keen as though it were based on wiser grounds. Hence it induced a quality of aloofness, of mystery. It robbed his association with others of reality. For him men and women were moving dots in an immensity of waste. For them he was bigoted, remote, self-sufficient. His kindnesses were

alarming; his philosophy, questionable. He was past finding out; that is to say, he was suspect.

In this metamorphosis of a soul, dumbly trying to find a place for itself in the midst of the little ways of men, he did not wholly lose contact with the passions and reactions of an earlier period. In the exuberance of youth, he had put himself in the hands of a trained boxer. . . .

Mahoney was a lightweight, forty years old, when Bruce, seventeen, went to him. He had long since left the ring and was living comfortably on the broad acres of his Nobles County farm. He was ugly to look at. A bash on the ear had disfigured him. His nose was turned jauntily to one side. A scar slanting upward from the corner of the mouth gave him a disturbing leer. His hair, the remaining fringe of it, was grizzled. His hands were gnarled, with enlarged joints and bones that had been broken. His had been the era of bare knuckles, a round ending only with a knockdown. It was, in those fierce days, a hard, cruel, unremunerative trade. Only the toughest and the cleanest came through. Mahoney had survived.

The boxer had heard of Bruce, whose natural dexterity at defending himself had won him some unenviable reputation. As Bruce stated the purpose of his call, the Irishman smiled, his gray eyes lighting up. A horrid finger pulled at a bony ear as he said,

"Yo' say will I learn you boxin'? I might. I been hearin' yer a divil of a scrapper. Put up yer jukes 'till I see once."

"Without gloves? I thought——"

"Do yo' do yer fightin' wid pretty gloves on yer hands then? Put up yer jukes, me braw lad, or—or—out ye go. And don't iver agin be darkenin' my door nor settin' foot on my land or it'll be the worse for yo'."

Something hot and mad seared Bruce. He threw away his hat—for what reason he had no idea—and shouted,

"Put up your hands!"

In a moment the expression of Mahoney's face altered, terribly. A prodigious frown drew his brows together, beneath which his eyes glowed, icy green, murderous. His teeth snapped sharply. He shifted his weight. Bruce struck out, swiftly. In after years that paragon of boxers, Joe Gans, was to call him the fastest man, amateur or professional, that he ever faced. Indeed, his reactions must have been more than normally brief for his flashing fist caught Mahoney squarely in the mouth. The blow had little behind it and it barely drew blood, but it turned the boxer into a whirlwind of attack. He rained blows upon his victim. This outburst of temper doubtless was assumed for he certainly pulled his blows. Otherwise Bruce could not have stood before him for half a minute. As it was, with nothing but rage and youth to aid, the boy fought back. A hard fist caught him on the chin. He went down but sprang up instantly and threw himself at his antagonist, snarling, cursing. He was down and up, down and up, half a dozen times. He stopped snarling. He was quiet, panting for breath, but determined. His fist flashed to the Irishman's stomach, but with so little drive that it did not even win a grunt. He was down again. As he crawled painfully to his feet, the boxer backed away, shouting,

"Rest, you crazy fool. 'Tis the end of the first round."

"There are no rounds in this fight."

“Rest yerself ahnyway. ’Twill do ye no harm. Set down, set down.”

Bruce noticed that the frown was gone and the eyes were kindly. He sat down. Mahoney brought him a dipper of water and as he gave it to him, his great hand rested lightly on the boyish head.

“You’ll do, me lad, you’ll do. You’ve had yer first lesson and ’tis no more than a lesson. I’m too auld a man to be wastin’ me time on a raw braggart who has no guts for punishment. Yo’ can be as clever as yo’ like, but ’tis punishment yo’ll get if yo’ go into this trade of mine. Many’s the lad comes to me and says, ‘Mahoney, will ye larn me boxin’?’ ‘I might,’ says I. Some of them goes down once and stays down. Some of them goes down two, three, four times and stays down. The stay-downers I kick out. Now and then there comes one as won’t stay down till they’re out. Him I larns to fight. Yo’ve got a quick and shifty way with you, will make it a joy to larn you, easy and light, the things I larned hard as hell. ’Tis no trade for a white goose, this one. ’Tis bitter as new whiskey, and that’s a fact. What makes one man take punishment, and another not, I dunno. What makes one faster with his fist and his head and his feet than another can ever learn to be, I dunno. Why a fighter’s head will tell him what’s happenin’ before it happens, I dunno. But what makes a fighter I know well enough and ’tis the lust to kill: ’Tis that and ’tis nothin’ more than that. When two killers meet, the one that’s the killin’est wins. You’ve got the eye. A bit back, there was hell’s fire murder in the look of it. Yo’ can depind upon it, me boy, there’s Irish blood in the veins of you. I het yo’, not once but half a dozen times, hard enough to sind a glass jaw to the hospitler. Yo’ don’t know nothin’. Yo’ve ivery thing to larn, but glory to Gawd, yo’ve got them things no man could larn you. Come round tomorrow and we’ll go at it right. No more bare fists. Eight-ounce gloves will make your jukes fly like chained lightnin’ when yo’ put on the little fellows or go at it with naked hands.”

Every day for four months, he boxed with Mahoney. Every day he rehearsed alone the things he had learned. He put on the gloves with no one but Mahoney. He became an adept in his school. The time came when, balanced on his toes, his feet would carry him, with swift, unerring reaction, out of harm’s way. And only just out of harm’s way. His head would automatically swing to one side the fraction necessary to permit a blow to slide harmlessly by. He learned to hit the spot at which he aimed and to drive his blow home with all his weight. Every parry is a blow, was Mahoney’s slogan, and his inside thrusts were beautiful and dangerous. It would be too much to say that Bruce became a finished boxer. A game so involved and subtle is not learned that quickly. Nevertheless, when he took his last lesson he was his teacher’s superior. This does not mean that he could have whipped Mahoney: it means he could outpoint him. In a finished fight the Irishman would have killed him.

Only once did Bruce use his knowledge professionally. That occurred at Crystal Lake, Iowa, the summer following his gruelling work with Mahoney. Crystal Lake was only a small body of water and had no significance as a town. Bruce was there for the Fourth of July celebration. The day was hot, no breeze stirring, and the high growing trees, with their heavy shade only muffled the heat. Farmers and the residents of small towns had assembled for drink, sports, oration, fireworks and dance. The leading event was a fight between Pugg Swift and Hammer Bell to take place on a canopied raft moored well out in the lake. Pugg did not arrive. Late in the day word was received that a train wreck would

make it impossible for him to arrive. Bell was on hand and, fight or no fight, he must be paid. The promoters were in despair.

Bruce had boxed with one or two of the town boys. He was known as young, strong and skillful. The managers appealed to him. He flouted the idea. Thompson, a young banker from the town in which Bruce temporarily lived, begged him, with tears and sweat running down his fat cheeks, to save them. Without a fight they would lose five hundred dollars—a colossal sum. Bruce wouldn't have to do much—merely face a professional fighter for eight rounds—be mauled and bruised and beaten by a man who outweighed him ten pounds. It looked like a small affair to the anxious business men. For this trifle they would pay him a hundred dollars. Thompson himself volunteered to act as his second. A hundred dollars! That fall Bruce was going to Winona to enter school. He yielded.

For the only time in his life Bruce sat in a corner of a roped-in arena and looked out upon the excited fans. Red-faced and beery, they glistened with sweat. The raft, with its canopy, was a bake oven. Bruce, fighting in running trunks and sneakers, stretched his wet arms along the ropes and calmly studied the crowd. He was without a sense of fear, but he was nervous. He was determined to earn his hundred dollars at the cost of as little punishment as possible. Opposite him lounged Bell. Bruce noticed that his ribs did not show; he was fat. The boy decided upon a Fabian policy; he would keep away, just far enough away. He knew that for twenty-five minutes, unless he were badly hurt, he could endure any strain of activity. He could not hope to stand up and exchange blows with that powerful man and last the limit. His feet must save him. They had already received their instructions. Time was called and the two men came out of their corners.

As they faced each other, less than a yard apart, in the center of the ring, Bruce noticed that there were wrinkles around Bell's eyes and here and there a white hair showed in his black thatch. One, two; one, two, three—Bell's gloves shot out, but Bruce was away from the first thrust and under the next swing. As he came up, he shot his fist hard to Bell's neck and they fell into a clinch. With his mouth close against Bruce's ear, Bell muttered, "Take it easy, kid. We don't get any more money for killin' each other." "All right with me," Bruce told him as they broke.

Thereafter for five more rounds, they gave a pretty exhibition of sparring. It was only in the seventh round that Bell cut loose. The blow rocked Bruce. He could thank some fighting ancestor on the Spanish main for the hard jaw that saved him. At the double-cross, rage gripped him and the green image of murder slipped into his eyes. But he remained calm. Not for nothing had he been beaten, day after day, by Mahoney. The insane desire to kill could exist side by side with a clearly functioning brain. He avoided the next rush obviously meant to put him out, but when Bell, confident and determined, drove in again, he stood still, let his head roll out of the way and flashed his glove, with the weight of his shoulder behind it, to the exposed chin. He followed with a left to the stomach and for the rest of the round hit his opponent at will. Twice Bell went down before the impetuosity of youth.

During the last intermission, Bell looked across at him and made a slight deprecatory motion with his glove. At the gesture the rage went out of Bruce. After all, the blow might have been accidental. What did it matter? There were only three minutes left. But for that one punch he had enjoyed the bout and was unmarked except for red splotches on the

body.

The final round was a tame affair. Bruce was content to keep out of the way, the memory of that one blow making him cautious. It was well for him that he was not lulled by overconfidence. With only a minute left to go, Bell grew vicious. Bruce shifted out of his way, but there was no mistaking the meaning of those fierce jabs. Again he rushed and again Bruce slipped away. Then he was at Bell's right side and for a split-second an exposed ear caught his eye. He hit it, with all his one hundred and forty pounds back of the blow. Bell went down but he struggled up, fell into a clinch, begged Bruce for Gawd's sake to remember their agreement, and the fight was over.

Bruce felt no exaltation at his success. He knew that he had met a third rater, grown old. In his ears, during the bout, there had been the fierce, profane, obscene words of the fans as they sought to excite the fighters to a keener and bloodier conflict. They were animals and neither their praise nor their censure could be important. In the arrogance of youth awaking, he turned his back upon them and strode away.

As he lay half-dressed in the shade of a tent with the flaps up, his late enemy came to him.

"Come with me, kid," Bell begged. "Come with me. You got a lot o' stuff. Me, I'm gettin' too old fer this game. I'll learn yo' some things yo' don't know and I'll get yo' fights. Me and you'll make a keg of money. I'm sorry I hit yo' but I done it to see if yo' could absorb it. You ken. I'll make somethink out o' yo', kid."

"It's no use, Bell. I don't like the game and it doesn't fit in with my plans. No use talking about it. I'm going back to school."

"What in hell a fighter wants o' school, I dunno."

"That's it. I'm not a fighter. There isn't anything in your line to tempt me. . . ."

For years after that fight the killing instinct lay dormant, lay so quiet that Bruce believed it had died. He found, however, that he carried it with him, must, probably, carry it with him to the end of his days.

Spooks was a bench-bred bull terrier given him by one of his reporters. With sensitive, sharp nose and narrowly cut ears which he erected straight like sentinels at attention, with creamy-white coat, not a black hair on him, he was an expression of instant, living beauty. Bruce always took the precaution of muzzling him when he let him out for a run. One morning he heard the uproar of a fight and saw that Spooks and a pit-bred terrier were mixing it. Running out, he came around the house in time to see the owner of the pit-bred dog kicking Spooks.

At the sight he discovered that he was still a killer. He shouted,

"Why in hell do you kick the muzzled dog? What harm can he do?"

"I'll kick what I damned well please," snarled the man, driving his boot into Spooks' ribs.

"You dirty coward of a pup," cried Bruce and said no more.

Sprague, the kicker, hit out as Bruce neared him, and was knocked down. Bruce dragged the dogs apart and, holding Spooks with one hand, knocked Sprague down again when he had struggled to his feet. Then he took his dog into the house and returned. Sprague had had enough. "I'm no street fighter," he announced with dignity.

“Then you shouldn’t go round kicking other people’s muzzled dogs,” Bruce told him. “That’s one of the best ways in the world to get a scrap.”

Afterwards, he felt better. The conflict and burst of rage had freed inhibitions. He was swept out of his morbid, introspective state and experienced, temporarily, a renewal of interest in outward things, an interest that included his son. For the first time he gave the child deliberate consideration. He found him mildly amusing—no more than that. The sense of fatherhood was not yet awakened. He could not yet forget his sensations at his son’s birth. He could not yet thrill in the presence of an unfolding human soul. Not yet were the scales lifted from his eyes, and he found this man child only mildly amusing.

XI

JEAN MARION PORTER had written a book, *The Bettertons*. Whether good or bad, Bruce did not know—he never read it. The novel attracted some attention, at least in Minneapolis, and the author flashed into momentary importance.

Bruce was present at a luncheon in Mrs. Porter's honor at the Commercial Club, into which he had been inducted by virtue of his position on *The Tribune*. Seated at Mrs. Porter's left, he renewed socially an acquaintance begun at the University. He was dazzled by his contact with this large handsome woman, whose dark eyes rested earnestly upon him—and who talked. Being an author, she talked of her work. Bruce was not, at that time, surfeited with these harmless egotisms and he absorbed her words. Doubtless it was this spirit of adoration that appealed to the writer and she expressed a desire to read to him the opening chapters of her new novel. The young man was immeasurably flattered at the proposal and they separated on the words that she would telephone more definite arrangements.

Not only did Mrs. Porter flatter him—she excited him, she stirred an ambition that had slumbered, that had given way to circumstances. The desire to write again reared itself. He was confident—if he could find the time. He was not wise enough to reflect that genius is beyond time and restraint. He believed and his belief was fed by what he legitimately characterized as a lack of opportunity. Besides, he had received encouragement. . . .

The idea came to him in a flash, only to be called inspiration. At "white heat" he wrote "A Bit of Gold," a story of the uprising of the French peasantry in 1789. In a glow of confidence, he sent it to *McClure's Magazine*. His mother was doubtful and tried bravely to soften the fall. "You mustn't be discouraged, Bruce, if they don't take this."

"I shan't, mother. But by jucks, it's a good story."

In time the story came back to him, but the note accompanying it was almost as good as a check.

"I am sorry we can't use 'A Bit of Gold' in *McClure's*. It is a good story but not quite what we want. It proves to us that you are a natural story teller and there is no reason why you shouldn't write for us. We shall be glad to read anything you send us." Signed, "S. S. McClure."

With the prospect of success thus immediately before him, Bruce, elated, sat down to another effort. He wrote an intensely romantic football story which won further praise from the kindly McClure but did not find a market. School and bread interfered; his writing became desultory, vanished. . . .

Now under Mrs. Porter's influence the desire again sprang up. He sent a typewriter home from the office and gave up his evenings to composition. He wrote to Mr. McClure with reference to a series of stories about the Indians. The patient editor, in whose mind there lingered no recollection of the youthful writer, said he could make no promises but would gladly give the stories consideration. Bruce knew the Indians. He had lived near them and among them. He had seen them squalid, filthy, quarrelsome, ignorant, debauched, lustful, lying, improvident, gluttonous. All of this information he put out of his

mind and wrote “The Passing of Whitelock”—a romance woven of nothing, born of his own unconscious but keen desire to escape from the world as he found it.

The story was returned with a rejection slip.

He wrote others in the same vein. They met with the same fate.

It was not that he was deliberately trying to present the Indian as fiction had created him. It was not that. He was not wise enough for that. It was merely that to him romance was the soul and the vestiture of art. He loathed realism as he loathed the life he was forced to live. His daily work threw him in contact with every sordid passion of the human mind. He was engaged in a business that reeked with realism and behind which he could not, at that time, see the illuminated form of Romance. His writing, worthless as it was, was an escape, a breath of fresh air. He did not thus analyze it. To him it was an intense expression of himself. Doubtless he was right, but he did not understand that this world he created was born of an untrained and unbridled imagination.

The reading with Mrs. Porter came near the close of this creative fury. He went out one evening and sat for a long time while, in a cultured, well-modulated voice, the writer read to him page after page of her new novel. There was no pause for praise or blame. Mrs. Porter was enjoying herself.

Bruce was at first shocked into attention. The thing was impossible. He watched sharply for the warning note that would tell him the story was a burlesque. That note never came. The face of the writer remained serious, touched with the highlight of the creator’s ecstacy. He lost the story in his reflection upon human vanity. It was incredible that Mrs. Porter, intelligent and cultured, looked upon this rot as worth while, that she could, deliberately and without compulsion, have taken the time to set it down on paper. It was incredible, but it was true. He came out of his brooding to hear Mrs. Porter read:

* * * * * * * *

“The essence of life is freedom,” Freda smiled, with a sigh back of the smile.

“But that precludes love, since in love there is no freedom,” Heinrich, through narrowed lids looked darkly upon the girl, leaning a little nearer her. Freda drew away, by an act of will, against the inclination of a breaking heart.

“Oh, love!” cooed Olga. “What is it? That, surely, is the highest freedom, don’t you think? The epitome of all liberty?”

She was sitting very close to Heinrich, her mass of glorious light hair only a few inches from his dark locks. Freda, her white face framed by her violet-black hair, looked upon them like melancholy, painted in black and white. Her lips moved but the dark man and his flaming companion could not hear her whispered words, “I’ll do it, I’ll do it.”

In that moment she was storm tossed as the rugged shores of the Scandinavia whence her forbears had sprung. Her soul was in upheaval. She was nearing the supreme test and she was unafraid. “There is no freedom in love,” she repeated to herself. “No. It drags one, and the black portal of destruction loses its terror. Oh, Heinrich, Heinrich, will you never, on some wild night, stand alone in the darkness and cry out for ‘Freda, Freda?’ Ah, Heinrich, in that moment I, set for love’s sake a faint star in the heavens, will shed my light around you but it will have no power to comfort and I shall never, never answer your cry.”

* * * * * * * *

Bruce gathered that the dark Freda was seriously contemplating self-destruction to make way for her light-haired and light-headed cousin Olga. Both girls were madly in love with Heinrich, whose choice between them wavered, but who, on the whole, appeared to prefer Olga. Why anyone should care a rap about any one of the platitudinous three, he couldn't imagine. Freda, obviously, was merely acting a part at the direction of the author. The others were lay figures before whom she performed.

The reader's voice faded. He was enveloped in a cold sweat, at the thought that he would be asked to criticise this drivel. Good God, criticise! Only screams and hysteria could do it justice. There was absolutely nothing to say. Yet something must be said. The reading could not go on forever and when she finished—He curled his feet under him, leaned his cheek on his hand, gave himself up to wretchedness. It was his first experience of being auditor to an author—and he was damnably conscientious.

The room was in half darkness, the reading lamp confining its attention almost exclusively to the manuscript. The wild thought occurred to him that he might slip away unobserved; the concentrated reader, probably, would not notice his escape. He moved tentatively. Mrs. Porter was instantly solicitous.

"Can I get you anything? Would you be more comfortable in that chair?"

He assured her he had everything he desired and was as comfortable in his present chair as he could possibly be in any other. "That," he reflected, "is certainly true."

Time passed, aeons of time spent in a realm of perpetual twilight dominated by carefully accentuated reading. Sitting curled up in his chair, he ceased to think, to feel, to hope. There could be no deliverance and there was no escape. Eternity had caught him and flung him into this pleasant room, into association with this handsome woman where every instant he was brought nearer the hell of her first question.

The voice ceased, the last page was turned down. The overtone of the final word died away. The silence increased, piled up, became a hideous nightmare. It was intolerable. Bruce sat as silent as one of Cooper's Indians. Out of an empty head he was trying to drag a semblance of a thought, to associate words that, meaningless, would suggest sense. His silence saved him. It was as though some good angel had seized him by the back of the neck and dragged him away from the mouth of the burning pit. He heard Mrs. Porter saying:

"That's the sincerest tribute I can ever hope to receive. I mean your silence. Do you know, you haven't moved for the last half hour. It's too much flattery. Even yet you haven't spoken . . . I understand . . . My friend, I thank you; but I don't deserve this. Really, I don't . . . We'll have some chocolate and afterwards. . . ."

"Please . . . If you don't mind, I'd rather not. I mean, no chocolate. . . . Would you care, awfully, if I went away now and we talked of this another time?" He controlled his voice, while he fought for a grip on the straw.

She flushed brightly. "Oh, you dear man, of course not. You can come out another evening. Telephone me. We'll go all over it . . . I know there must be heaps of things you'd like to say . . . Oh, yes, that'll be best . . . Good-night . . . I can never thank you enough for what you've done for me . . . I never realized there could be anyone in the world so understanding!"

Rescued thus by a miracle he went out. Obviously he had, by his attitude, lied. He had

been a coward but he had not, save by implication, been a sycophant. The author had created a part for him and he had let her elaborate it as she pleased. He had done no more than that. No more? It was too much. He raged at himself, he cursed his "white liver." He anathematized his courtier ancestors who had bred into him a fear of women, who had bequeathed him the chivalry that elevated them and made it impossible to tell them brutal truths. It was characteristic that he should overemphasize the episode, reading it large as a thing of importance, where no importance, or very little, attached. . . . Out of such white mists he would create for himself black fogs. . . .

At home he found Cora on the verge of hysterics. At his appearance she broke into sobs. He was heartless, selfish, inconsiderate. He didn't have to stay home with the baby. No, he could go gadding wherever he liked until one o'clock in the morning while she sat home and waited . . . Mrs. Porter? What did she care for Mrs. Porter? Reading her novel! A likely story. Just the two of them? A nice thing to do. Why couldn't she have been asked? She could listen as well as he. Better, perhaps. She couldn't see that his brains were proving anything exceptional. . . . A pretty life she had to lead. If he weren't running around the town, heaven knew where, he was at his typewriter, and she didn't dare open her mouth. She called upon the saints to witness the devotion with which she served him and all the world could see the thanks she got for it. . . . A writer! Did she have to have men with her until one o'clock in the morning to be a writer? She'd rather be decent than a writer. . . . What did all this writing get them? It hadn't got him much that she could see. Waste paper. . . . It was only an excuse, this writing. An excuse for what? He knew well enough. . . . He hadn't taken it up until after he had met that Porter woman. . . . What was he going to do now? Stay up the rest of the night? Very likely. He would be capable of it, as long as he knew it annoyed her. She would have to get up to feed the baby but that needn't disturb him. He could sleep—he could sleep through anything. Nothing ever kept him awake. The house could fall down about his head. . . . She could sleep, too, if she had a chance.—When did she ever get a chance? The baby had to be fed every four hours, and if she didn't feed him she would like to know who would?

At last she grew less bitter through sheer weariness. . . . She explained that an occasional evening out was not to be seriously criticised, was not, in itself, necessarily reprehensible. An evening, half the night, spent with a strange woman—even if she did teach at the university—was another matter. But in the end Bruce gathered that the thing that really did matter were the hours spent in front of the typewriter. Just why she took so keen an umbrage at this, at worst innocent conceit, he could not discover. That she considered it wasted time and in some sort a betrayal of herself became evident. . . .

Bruce was shocked to learn her estimate of his work. He did not feel, as he had felt when talking to the long lost Ellen, that her confidence and support were essential to his success. A little encouragement in the face of his difficulties, he would have appreciated—it would, at least, have plucked the bitterness from the rejection slips. It had not occurred to him that his efforts might, in some way, be considered as worse than wasted time; that they might be thought to indicate, on his part, a failure toward his responsibilities. This thought, as thrown out by his wife, he found frightful. He had not, at that time, any consciousness of a keener responsibility than that involved in providing for wife and child. His bitterest tirades were directed against those who failed in this obvious duty.

Therefore it was not surprising that Cora's words closed his typewriter, and the ambition to write of men and women who lived in a beautiful, unreal world again slumbered. . . .

XII

THERE had been a wire from Chicago the evening before, and Bruce and Clarence were at the station to meet the Pioneer Limited. A March wind, in which the sting of winter still lingered, drove across the Mississippi, bringing with it the commercially subdued noise of the Falls of St. Anthony. A veiled, newly risen sun gave a cheerless countenance to a cheerless world. . . .

The brothers spoke of the weather, a backward spring; of the murdered woman at the National Hotel; of the trite and sordid affairs that make up a reporter's world. Of the returning mother they made no mention. She was not cured. She had suffered, had found the strength to endure, and was returning alive. The New York quack, whom Clarence had discovered, had done his painful best and failed.

There was the roar of an incoming train, and the brothers advanced to meet it. A porter assisted Mrs. Darton to the platform. Bruce saw her and, with a great hatred sweeping over him, he turned upon his brother. . . . So for a second he stood, tense for the spring. Then his clinched hands relaxed, the fury went out of him. Clarence's face was ashy gray and a dumb horror looked out of his eyes. It was as though he had seen the cup of cheer, drawn by his hand for a loved one, turn to a deadly poison as it was swallowed. In that moment Bruce realized that heartlessness had had no part in his brother's mad scheme. He had believed and belief had blinded him. This sudden realization of his mistake crushed him.

Bruce left him and hurried to his mother. She was barely able to stand, supported by Millie and the porter. She was wasted to bones and stood there a trembling skeleton. Only the white hair, showing beneath her widow's bonnet, and the gray eyes remained unchanged. For a moment he held her close to him and neither of them spoke. . . . Then he picked her up as he might a child, and with her arms clasped around his neck, carried her to the waiting hack. . . .

XIII

MRS. DARTON lay in bed, one thin hand resting in Bruce's. The shaded light threw death shadows around her face in the midst of which her moving, half-smiling eyes appeared grotesque, eerie. Her voice, once rich and full of color, had fallen to a wisp of a whisper.

She spoke of the East, of the beautiful place on the banks of the Hudson where she had been treated. She praised Dr. Wharton, the head of the institution. He was a kind man, he had done all he could to make her comfortable. No one could do much. The treatment—was severe. . . . He had cried when he told her he could do nothing more for her. Poor man! He had so wanted to cure her. If she had had a little more strength—"I tried, Bruce. I did try . . . I couldn't stand it. I'm sorry, Bruce. Especially for Clarence. He was so sure . . . I'm an awful coward, Bruce. . . . I thought I knew what pain meant. I didn't . . . You don't think I should have gone on, Bruce?"

He laid his face against hers. "No, mother. No, no, no, no. . . ."

Again: "At first I walked in the grounds. They were pretty. Right on the bank of the Hudson—on top of the bluffs. They don't call them bluffs. There were steamers, bigger than any I ever saw, going up and down the river. And cars! I never dreamed there were so many automobiles in the world . . . Sometime I should like to ride in one . . . You've been in them, I suppose."

"No, mother. Hamblin has been going to take me, but something always happens."

"Never mind, you will . . . They look comfortable . . . There were oak trees—the grounds full of them. And squirrels . . . People were nice to me . . . I'm afraid poor Millie didn't have a very good time. I wasn't much company for her. But she got to know a few folks—no one she liked very well. They're different, Bruce. I don't know, may be not. I got along with them nicely. So would you. After all, they're just folks. Of course, I didn't see much of them—only those who were in the hospital with me, and they came from all over. There was a woman from Florida . . . She made me think of Harry. I had two or three letters from him . . . Poor boy. I'm afraid he isn't doing very well. . . ."

Harry was her oldest son. Fifteen years older than Bruce, only a year younger than Maggie, her first child. Bruce had been only ten years old when Harry went away. . . .

Scarcely a breath of wind stirred the dust in the prairie roads. A mile and a half away lay the little town, hardly seeming to rise above the flat plain to which it clung. Nearer at hand were the Three Maidens, great rocks, each as large as a small house, left in this strange setting by the melting of a prehistoric glacier. Around them still clung an Indian legend, which gave them their name and a melodramatic atmosphere. Bruce had played around them a hundred times with no thought, no knowledge, that he was thus brought in contact with a time when the prairie was covered with ice and the polar bear wandered where the rocks then lay.

Within doors something unusual was going on. Bruce sensed this without understanding what was afoot. Harry and his mother were talking in low voices or they were silent, the young man refusing to meet the gray eyes and moving restlessly about,

stowing away his possessions in a telescope bag. At last his preparations were completed. He turned with an air of assumed resolution to his mother and said,

"Guess I'll be going."

"Why so soon, Harry? The train doesn't go until two o'clock. That's three hours yet."

"It's a long walk." He kicked the bag at his feet. "That thing isn't so light."

"But three hours for a mile and a half——"

"I've got a good deal farther than that to go."

"Farther? I don't understand."

"Oh, well, if you must know. . . . I'm going to get the train at the watertank."

"Whom are you afraid of at the station?"

"I don't know . . . Several people . . . I don't want any trouble."

In that instant there came back to Bruce the recollection of a young man sobbing in the dark, one who had been set upon and beaten by a gang—into whose heart a great fear had been driven, who was still carrying the scars of that conflict.

"What trouble could they make you, Harry?"

"You know. I haven't money enough to pay everybody. They could sue me and keep me here for a while. Joe would go without me."

"I see . . . I hate to have you go away as though you were doing something dishonorable."

"It's all right. I'll pay 'em. But I can't pay now. . . . Good-by, kid." He held Bruce's hand for a moment and then turned to his mother. The parting was brief, almost brusque. There were no tears in the woman's eyes. Harry lighted his pipe, shouldered his bag and marched away. He was going with Joe Niedic, a man for whom Bruce had no regard, largely because he combed his hair down smooth on his forehead. They were going South, probably to Florida—Joe had relatives there.

"Mother," Bruce asked, "what's Harry goin' to the watertank for?"

"To get the train."

"But why?"

"You heard what he said."

"I hope I'm never in debt, Mother . . . If I am I won't run away."

Suddenly she put her arms around him and held him close to her. The tears were flowing now, but the voice was steady.

"Bruce, dear, Harry has to do this because he's been drinking. You know what that means?"

"Of course."

"Bruce, I want you to make me a promise, will you?"

"Yes."

"You're only a little boy." She held him away from her and looked at him. "Why, you're just a baby. And I want you to give me a man's promise. Oh, how can I make you understand!"

"I don't know, Mother. But I'll promise, and I'll keep my promise."

Her eyes held him, absorbed him. Never again were they so near each other.

"I think you will, my Bruce—I think you will . . . Promise me that as long as I live you'll never take a drink of anything that has alcohol in it—whiskey or beer or wine. Promise me."

His hot wet hand closed over hers, and he clung to it tightly—to strengthen himself, to reassure her, and because he was a little frightened.

"I promise, Mother."

It was impossible that he should understand the nature of the vow he had taken, but the circumstances were impressive and the whole conversation was indelibly fixed on his mind. So powerful was the influence and so sacred did he consider that pledged word, that not once, by a hair's breadth, did he violate that covenant.

Harry got away without trouble. There was a letter from him mailed at La Crosse. They were going South from there, possibly down the river. That was the last word for many, many months. Bruce was too young to appreciate his mother's worry during that period just as he was too young to realize the significance of a remark he heard her make to Millie a few days after Harry left.

"I was worried about Bertha," she said. "But I've seen her. She's all right. I'm glad of that."

"I shouldn't have been surprised," said Millie. "She's a weak-kneed sister."

Bertha Perkins was a dark eyed, flat girl whom Bruce disliked. There were those who thought her pretty but for the life of him he couldn't see why. He was convinced she wasn't very bright for she was only a couple of grades ahead of him in school, though five or six years older. He couldn't understand what Harry had found interesting in her. At any rate he was glad she was "all right." He supposed that meant she wasn't crying her eyes out because Harry had gone away.

He remembered one girl who had created a terrible scene when Hugh Blackfield had gone away. But Hattie Moore was pretty. She had hair that curled tightly to her head and a well-rounded form that delighted his boyish eyes. Hugh had sent back word by Guy Raymond, "Tell Hattie you saw me off and I was looking well."

Hattie had fainted at the message and then gone into hysterics. She was going to have a baby, people said, and needed Hugh.

Anyway it was obvious Bertha wasn't going to have a baby and wouldn't need Harry . . .

That hiatus in Harry's life—the months when he didn't write—was never really explained. Bruce learned, long afterwards, that his mother believed he had spent that time in jail, though how she arrived at this conclusion he never knew. Eventually he wrote from Florida. He was married, and Joe Niedic's brother said he had married a girl with a barrel of money. That turned out to be false. He was at Fort Meade, living rather precariously, a condition that had, apparently, become chronic, so that it persisted even after he moved to Ocean Grove and began to dabble in real estate. According to Mrs. Darton he was still a hand to mouth man. . . .

"You needn't worry about him, Mother," Bruce told her. "He'll always manage to make a living."

“I know. But I should like to see him comfortable. Poor boy! He hasn’t had a very easy time of it, Bruce.”

“That’s true. But he’s getting along. Clarence hears from him now and then.”

“Doesn’t he ever write to you?”

“He used to. But you know how I am. I won’t write letters. I always mean to, but somehow——”

“Don’t worry him about me. It wouldn’t do any good. It’s so long since I saw him—I suppose I should hardly know him now . . . He’d be a stranger . . . My first boy . . . And Buck . . .”

“I was thinking of him.”

“I wish he were here.”

“Yes. If we knew where he is——”

“You be good to him, Bruce, if he ever comes back.”

“You bet. I can understand him, but Harry——”

“And don’t quarrel with Clarence. He won’t ever understand you, Bruce, but it’s just the same now as it was when you were children: he’ll follow you anywhere—and be glad to follow. Let him. Do you remember when I used to make you take him with you?”

It was a light conversation, only of this and that but now and then it probed to the depth of the influences that had gone into their lives. Those two had no need for explanation—they knew. At the mention of Buck there had been a catch in the heart of each, and each knew this. They could not ponder that subject. “Be good to him, Bruce.” The admonition was unnecessary but it was natural. He understood the love out of which it sprang as he understood the feeling that prompted his ready reply. To her Buck was the poor little black sheep gone astray; to Bruce he was an understanding soul. . . .

XIV

BUCK was hard as nails. His eye was gray, his nose aquiline, his jaw prognathic. A scar at the corner of his eye gave him a vicious appearance, betrayed by a deep twinkle of humor. He was small from the ground up, but his shoulders were broad and for his size his strength was prodigious. Into his fibers was woven the quality that gives men endurance and there had been no germ of fear planted in his mind. He would have undertaken the labors of Hercules without an instant's hesitation, and, with the assistance given that distinguished athlete, probably would have won through. Thus, utterly empty of fear, he was also without caution. His recklessness was proverbial. He had his scar from twisting a balky mule's tail, though he was repeatedly warned of the danger of that pastime.

At fourteen, he rode a wild steer at a Fourth of July celebration—and escaped uninjured. At fifteen, he chummed up with the lion tamer of a small circus that came to town and spent a quarter of an hour in the lion's den. He permitted the elephant to wrap his trunk around him and lift him high into the air. He climbed the church steeple and on a dare stood on the ball that surmounted the staff. He joined the volunteer fire company and when the Methodist church burned he was the last man to leave the roof. He hopped along the ridge pole, pike in hand, slid down the smoking shingles and reached a ladder an instant before the roof fell in. He rode "outlaws," horses that could not be ridden; he drove runaway teams and taught them to heed the bit; he skated when the ice was too thin to bear his weight; he let an itinerant showman shoot an apple off his head, a cigar out of his mouth. He did these things, not from bravado, but for money, as all in the day's work, and no recital of his exploits ever crossed his lips. Indeed he talked little, though *The Tales of Baron Munchhausen* was his favorite book.

He was the soul of loyalty. A slighting remark about a friend of his was the signal for a fight, and the size or redoubt of the offender were never matters for consideration. As a result, he fought often and not always successfully. Blinded with rage and empty of caution, he left himself an easy mark for a cool and even moderately skillful opponent. He had no faculty of learning from experience and to the last he fought with the abandon of his boyhood—an abandon that sometimes won and always inflicted punishment on his enemy.

His earliest dream was of the West and he talked often to Bruce of that wild, marvelous land. The fiction of its romantic liberties appealed to him; he needed freedom and space and he dreamed that they were to be found "out West." In the picture he painted, there was no appeal to Bruce's fancy. To him the lure came from the East.

"The East? Aw, what yo' mean by the East?"

"Chicago, New York, London, may be."

"Yo' don't mean to cross the ocean?"

"Why not? I ain't 'fraid."

"Neither am I. But who wants to go out of 'merica? There ain't no horses to ride over there nor no place to ride 'em. You come West with me. May be we'll find a gold mine."

“I don’t want a gold mine. I want to see different people.”

“Aw, hell, ain’t there people enough for yo’ to see out West?”

His desire was not to be gratified; he was not then to go into the roaring West. In after years he may have won there, but that was conjecture and remained forever an uncertainty.

Bruce was sixteen when Buck ran away with the daughter of a wealthy farmer and was married. It was, of course, the kind of thing he would do. Old man Cochrane had sworn to kill him, and Fred, his son, was joined with the father in this murderous design. So Buck carried the girl to the county seat and married her and returned home, supremely indifferent. There was no killing. One doesn’t kill a son-in-law who cannot be intimidated.

It was an ill match. Blanche was poorly equipped to mate with this wild spirit. She had been fascinated; she was soon disillusioned and poverty added its sting. Though Old Man Cochrane did no murder he refused to aid the young people, and Buck’s was not the temperament to settle down to a hard grind. He did what he could, prompted by loyalty and devotion, but it was impossible to harness his fierce nature and the time came when, literally, there was no food for his wife and baby. Of this struggle at a distance, Bruce knew nothing and when the bolt fell it came with shocking suddenness.

It was a hard winter even for Minnesota. There was no work to be had, and those without credit or provisions were reduced to the sorriest straits. Among these was Buck. Those who knew him could not expect that he would sit quietly by and watch his wife suffer. He did the only thing that seemed to him possible to do: He broke into a warehouse and stole provisions. Apprehended in the act, no defense was possible and he was sentenced to the penitentiary at Stillwater for five years.

Blanche was immediately received by her parents and her physical sufferings were at an end. Bruce convinced himself that Buck’s conduct had been deliberate, that he had sacrificed himself in the assurance that he was saving his wife and child. Of this he never had confirmation but he clung to it as a key that made understandable the character of his brother.

For good conduct Buck’s sentence was shortened to three and a half years. He came from Stillwater directly to Winona. Bruce and his mother were at the station to meet him. He was unchanged; undemonstrative, silent as ever. He was wearing the prison overcoat of which he was extremely self-conscious. Bruce, noticing this, offered at once to change coats with him. He angrily refused.

He had been home only a few days when he received a letter that disturbed him. Later he confided in Bruce.

“Blanche is getting a divorce. It’s her damned father, I suppose.”

In this tragedy, Bruce could give him little aid. He made the only suggestion that occurred to him.

“Why don’t you go see her.” The reply was startling.

“She doesn’t want to see me. Won’t write again.”

“Not much of the good pal there.”

“Keep your damned mouth shut.”

“Sorry . . . All you can do then is forget it.” Unconsciously Bruce was at that moment

voicing a philosophy that, years later, was to become the governing tenet of his life.

Buck rose and walked up and down the small room, passing and repassing on the far side of the table at which Bruce sat. It was winter and late at night. The small stove, with fire burning low, only slightly moderated the chill. Without the wind boomed through the great elm trees and over all was a deep blanket of snow. Down town Clarence was at work on *The Morning Independent*. Upstairs, Mrs. Darton slept. The two were alone; and they were silent.

Buck continued his slow pacing. When the light fell on his face Bruce felt that he could see into his brother's soul; there was thus bared for him the struggle that was taking place. He turned his face away that he might not behold mysteries meant for no human eye.

The wind roared in sudden bursts of fury and the house creaked and complained. There was a sobbing in the naked trees and in the intervals of comparative quiet one heard the soft swish of the snow against the windows. It was a night fit for turmoil and dark passion.

"It was just such a night," Buck broke the silence. For an instant Bruce did not follow him. Then he understood. Buck referred to that night three years and a half before. "God, but it was cold. The old warehouse roared like Niagara. If it hadn't been so damned cold, they wouldn't have got me."

"Are you sure of that?" Bruce asked and his brother paused in his walk to give him a long stare. Without replying he resumed his slow tramping. The noises of the night beat down on them again and they were lost in the midst of the mad conflict. Buck paused and Bruce saw that something new had come into his face.

"It's a good night to start out again," he said. "A damned good night. The harder the fight the more the fun . . . I'll make the two o'clock train—prison overcoat and all. Wait here."

Swiftly and silently he ran upstairs and returned in a few minutes with his well-worn grip in his hand. Over his arm hung the detested overcoat.

"It's no use waking mother . . . I'll write . . . Take care of yourself, old man."

Their hands met. Bruce was as one under a spell. Words of protest formed in his mind. He did not utter them. They were branded useless before they were born. The poetic justice of the act stirred him: it was what he himself might have done.

"I'll go to the station with you."

"No, you won't. You stay right here. Mind that."

"Here—wait. I've got a little money."

The door opened letting in a great tumult.

"Don't need it," were Buck's last words as he closed the door behind him.

Bruce stood still, stricken, helpless. He was only a boy and it was not surprising that he had succumbed before the will of so dominant a man. Yet he felt that the best part of him had gone out into the storm with Buck and that he had begun endless perigrinations through darkness and wind and snow—a feeling that never quite left him and which came back, cruelly intense, whenever he thought of that night.

When Clarence came home he brought with him the discarded prison overcoat. He had

found it draped over a fence post and shaking its empty folds in the wind . . . To Bruce it was the malevolent symbol of the passing of his best-beloved brother.

XV

MRS. DARTON'S agonies were steadily increasing. Her death was a slow fading of faculties and a swift cumulation of pain. Every night Bruce was at her bedside and every night she was weaker, more tortured, less coherent. One spring evening, when all nature was struggling toward a fine outburst of reawakening life, she resumed, for a few minutes, her accustomed clearness of mind, and they had their last talk . . .

"I was only a girl, Bruce—a mere child. Your father was so handsome! All the girls were mad about him . . . I never dreamed he'd look at me. But he did . . . I can't tell you much of his early life. He never told me. Neither did your uncle David. May be he would—He wanted me to marry him after your father died. I couldn't do that . . . I know his mother was a big woman. There was a story. Your grandfather was after the boys, David and Henry—your father. They had been up to some mischief and he had a whip. They ran to their mother and she hid them under her petticoats and her husband went off still looking for the boys. I don't say it's true. Henry told me . . ."

"The knife, Mother?"

"Oh, that nightmare . . ."

"Never mind. Don't think of it."

"It was a woman, of course . . . How can I tell? It was long before I met him, but I thought it would never end . . . She must have been beautiful. David told me. She was a McArthur. Rich, I suppose. And big—not a little thing like me . . . Oh, I don't know what happened . . . I got fragments from David . . . They were riding, she and Henry. She was killed. The horse fell, Henry said. David believed him . . . Many didn't. The law freed him . . . They came to kill him—oh, a posse. He escaped. I think some of them were hurt. Worse. David said, at least one of them . . . They hunted him with bloodhounds . . . He was unpopular before that. He was an abolitionist. Some way he got to Ohio. They were on his trail, the McArthurs and their friends . . . The war, of course, stopped it. Afterwards they took it up again . . . They found him in Indianapolis. He was a powerful man, your father—the strongest in his regiment . . . No one was killed that time, but one was terribly hurt. They had pistols and he had only his knife . . . I don't know what happened. He would never talk about it . . . He was covered with blood but not badly hurt . . . Old McArthur died in the late seventies and the others gradually forgot the feud. Henry carried his knife until after you were born . . . That's all I know about it . . ."

"Uncle David believed the horse stumbled?"

"Yes, yes . . . I have often wondered about Mary McArthur . . . You know your father's temper. But he had a way with women . . . And he was gentle. Even in his rages he only talked—to women. He hated suffering. He would turn his back upon it—and forget it. You have that trait, Bruce. Watch out for it . . . He was devoted. I often tried to guess why he didn't leave me and the children. I shouldn't have blamed him. We were a terrible burden . . . He never did. He neglected us, but he always clung to us . . . He would rob us but he was penitent . . . He sold the homestead in Rock county, where Buck was

born, for eighteen hundred dollars—a lot of money then. He took it to Sioux City and lost it, gambling and drinking. He came home a wreck of himself. He told me what had happened and wept on my shoulder—vowing over and over never to drink again . . . I don't know how Mary McArthur could have resisted him . . . Yes, the horse must have stumbled . . ."

She ceased, exhausted. Bruce smoothed her brow and as the pain gripped her, he held a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform to her nose. She breathed deeply, eagerly—and slept.

Some people had believed his father was a murderer. With that temper—Bruce didn't blame him for whatever happened when the mob came to get him. With what had he fought then? Was he already armed with the deadly knife? One against a posse! Had no friend come to his aid? Or had there been help for him in that mad crowd? "Men loved him." Surely there must have been some assistance. . . . And afterwards? He heard the baying of the bloodhounds; he could see the powerful man forcing his way through the mountains of West Virginia, fighting grimly towards the river on whose northern shore was comparative safety. . . . Years later in Indianapolis. His assailants were armed. Why had they given him a chance to fight? Why, if they were convinced of his guilt, had they not shot him down on sight? Had the assassins tried to wrest from him a confession—and so given him an opportunity? Mary McArthur had been dead for fifty years and one could no longer invade the realm of Pluto to win an answer to a riddle . . .

That was the last talk. It was not the last long hour of sitting by to watch her misery, to listen to the suppressed groans, to the rattling painful breathing; to see her face, drawn and haggard, as the morphine and chloroform yielded before the pain; to hear her half-articulate prayers for death; to shudder at the eagerness with which she breathed the peace-giving vapors.

Often sitting at her side, he thought she had drawn her last tortured breath—and was glad. But always the worn lungs once more took up the struggle for air and the wasted form still lived. Her endurance was past belief. She could eat nothing and her nourishment was given to her hypodermically. Yet, praying for death, weak beyond description, the body refused to die. More than once, he was called from home or the office to be present at the last moment; but always, wracked and twisted, she fought back the darkness.

Bruce was as white as the dying creature on the bed. Her pains renewed themselves in him. The consciousness of what she suffered was never out of his mind. He did his work automatically, convinced that everything outside of that chamber of death was unreal. He had no existence apart from the invalid; he was absorbed, consumed, in the fight she was making. It was at that time that he began to dream of his mother. Every night visions of her came to him in his sleep; and these dreams, these fantasies were, in the end, the lever by means of which the whole course of his life was changed . . .

The end was at hand. A few hours, the doctor said. All night long Bruce sat by her bed. All night long he watched her face as she lay unconscious, or roused only to breathe the chloroform and rest again. Now and then she muttered to herself, unintelligibly. Occasionally he could understand the words. She was reliving a far off time, or she was crooning to a baby in her arms. Now and then she cried out sharply as though some old pain had again smitten her. For the most part, she lay still or moaned softly.

Day's ghostly light crept into the room . . . Bruce leaned close to his mother, fearful,

hopeful, that the end might have come while he watched the light run up the eastern sky. He was deceived; she still breathed . . . It grew broad daylight. His sister came in. Clarence was there. They stood about the bed, voiceless. The figure of Death, hovering so near, struck them mute. They waited. It was appalling. Bruce felt himself shrink, as one robbed of self-respect by an ignoble performance . . . They were spectators waiting for the trap to be sprung . . .

Clarence's wife came in. Bruce resented her presence. This horror was private. His nerves were at the snapping point . . . His sister went out to get breakfast. After a time the others followed her. Bruce was again alone—alone with his victim. Good God, it was past endurance. He leaned far out the window, breathing deeply, fighting to hold back the hysterical screams.

There was a murmur from the bed. He turned back to his mother. Her eyes begged for the saturated handkerchief. He wet the cloth and held it to her nose. She breathed strongly. He poured on more chloroform. Her breath rattled strangely . . . He emptied the bottle and pressed the handkerchief to her nose. There was a sobbing, choking breath or two—and a great silence: a silence, mysterious, brooding, impenetrable, enveloping; a mad, suffocating silence; a cold, bitter, inhuman silence. Bruce, in uncontrollable frenzy, shouted aloud and the others ran to him . . .

BOOK II

FATHER AND SON

FATHER AND SON

I

BRUCE, surprised, found that the consummation of death brought no keen pain. Peaceful and soothing silence had taken the place of moans and a choking fight for breath. He was content. Horror had piled upon horror during the past year and his numbed nerves could no longer respond to the urge of natural emotions. The climax, for him, had come when his mother started East to enter the torture chamber. As was said, he was at that moment isolated and the present merely emphasized or rather merely increased his consciousness of that loneliness. Before death intervened, he had become familiar with the paths of an empty world.

Clarence was heartbroken. Calmly, Bruce studied him. And in his brother's grief he found something pitiful and pitiable. He was so helpless, so entirely without mental resources, that one could only suffer with him, striving, vainly, for some relief. The silence that Bruce found tranquilizing appeared agony to Clarence. It was as though he would have been glad to hear again the sounds of pain from her who was now quietly at rest.

There was no longer any bitterness in Bruce. But he felt, as he was to feel all the rest of his life, that he must forever remain a stranger to this brother.

Uncle David came to the funeral. He had loved his brother's widow and he reverently bowed his white head before her coffin and sat for a long time looking out with his old eyes upon that still, slightly smiling face. His rugged features, carved by seventy hard years, gave no hint of the deep-lying emotions. To Bruce the old man's immobile grief was far more moving than Clarence's sobs. Here he saw intensity and passion, smothered fires that would never be permitted to break forth.

A small, withered, silent man was Uncle David. He had been, for forty years, a lawyer, in a small way, in the little town of Greenville, Ohio. He had raised a family of boys and girls who were all gone from him now. His wife had died twenty-five years ago and he had lived to be alone in the world. Yet his gray eyes, from beneath the heavy thatch of brows that half hid them, looked keenly and interestedly upon life. Here was no mental tottering, though obviously the final signal trembled upon the stroke.

Bruce, searching that hiding face, found a strange fascination in the thought: "He knew my father. He knows about Mary McArthur. And he doesn't believe father killed her—or does he believe it?" It became Bruce's one concern in life to wrest from the old man the truth about that tragedy. The wresting proved difficult. Again and again as they sat in the evening smoking, Bruce approached the subject, but could win grunts only or monosyllables in reply. It seemed impossible to open up that storehouse of information, and Bruce, smitten with a cruel suspicion of his father, saw the one man in all the world who could give him the facts preparing to go away forever.

Uncle David was leaving on Saturday. Thursday evening he and Bruce sat as usual, silent, smoking. Bruce was resigned. It was bitter but it was inevitable. He pledged

himself to endurance and began deliberately to erase from his mind the memory of the scarifying fragments his mother had given him.

Cora came in with her son, Jack, and a light that was reminiscent and illuminating stirred in Uncle David's eyes—lingered, went out.

"Ain't he the grandest baby!" said Cora, and Bruce, paternity not yet fully awake, stirred uneasily.

Uncle David grunted and the light glowed for a second time.

Cora had seen her husband's nervous movement and now she flashed out:

"Bruce doesn't care a thing about him. You'd think he wasn't his son. May be he's ashamed of him."

"Nonsense, Cora," Bruce said smiling at her. "It's only—I can't show everything I feel."

"It's lack of interest, that's what it is. You don't care." She laughed in saying this, but there was a dry quality to the tone that stung the blood into Bruce's face. Cora, raising her eyes in time to catch the blush, added, "Any way, he has the grace to be ashamed of his heartlessness. Now, kiss your son good-night, but don't make him smell like a cigar factory if you can help it." She extended the child to Bruce and afterwards held the round pink face close to Uncle David's shriveled cheek. So for an instant unseeing youth stared at passing age and it came into Bruce's mind that he had witnessed the meeting of two eternities.

Cora went out and Bruce could feel the silence re-establishing itself. He forgot David and was thinking of his son, this strange, problematical creature whom he had given to the world. There were no answers to the questions that came to mind. Time, the wild thief of men's lives, would solve them all—but the solutions would come too late. Bruce was certain of that.

"You're worried." Uncle David, grown voluble, had started a conversation.

"Not specially."

"Yes. I see it. No use. Don't do any good. Can't be helped though. Worried about her. Yes. Worried about Henry—your father. Asked a lot of fool questions. I see through you. Get hold of yourself. Hell, what a lot of talk."

"If I knew about father—"

"What's use? Happened fifty years ago."

"But I want to know." Bruce's cry was a confession and a prayer, a revelation—the baring of a soul. It was intense, irresistible. For a long time David sat looking at his nephew, studying the harassed face, reliving the days half-a-century in the past.

"All right. I'll tell you. Didn't believe Henry was right then, don't believe it now. Hate to repeat his fool notions. Might influence you. Just the kind of a young idiot to accept 'em. Can't help it. Hate to see you worried."

A breath that was half a sob was Bruce's only answer as he leaned forward, eager to catch every word.

II

"FINE looking boy, Henry. Straight and tall; wide shoulders and narrow hips. At eighteen as good a man as there was in Virginia. Could out-shoot and out-talk the best of 'em. Wise praised him, old Governor Wise. Liked him. Called him great orator. At the university and popular. Don't see kids like him nowadays. I don't. That couldn't last. Too good . . . He read too much."

Bruce, steeped in the history of the pre-war days, could reconstruct his father's story from his uncle's terse half-sentences as the old man went on painting the picture of a vanished epoch.

"Hell to pay when Brooks beat Sumner. All over the South. . . ."

* * * * * * * *

There was applause and cheering on the campus as young Darton approached a group of students who were listening to one of their fellows make a speech. He stood outside the circle of excited boys and at what he heard his heart sickened within him. The hour had struck.

Harold Barthe finished his speech and his eye rested for a moment on Darton. He smiled joyously as he added:

"And now, gentlemen, the concluding word will be spoken by our distinguished orator, Henry Darton."

Instantly the crowd took up the cry, "Darton, Darton, we want Darton."

The cheering boys opened in front of Henry. He was crowded forward toward the improvised platform; he was boosted up and stood facing them. Tall and straight he was, with hair touched with red, brushed straight back from a high brow. His eye was hazel and clear, but his face in this moment was dead white. His plum-colored broadcloth cutaway sat around the shoulders without a wrinkle. His black stock, above which appeared the high points of a soft collar, emphasized the absence of color in his cheeks. In his hand he held his wide-brimmed, high-crowned black hat. His ruffled shirt front and long elaborate waistcoat above fawn colored trousers and shiny boots proved him a member of the Old Dominion's aristocracy.

But why was his face white and why was the accustomed smile absent from his lips? Why did he look out grimly, defiantly, upon his cheering friends? He had addressed them a hundred times upon a hundred different subjects and his rich figures of speech and sallies of wit were their delight. Yet now he eyed them as enemies and steeled himself to say the thing that was in his mind.

Up in Washington a congressman from South Carolina had attacked a senator from Massachusetts and with a cane had beaten him into insensibility. And this had been done in defense of the honor of the South! It was for this that the students cheered. It was to start a movement that would send to the congressman from South Carolina a large number of testimonial canes that the present meeting was being held.

"Gentlemen of Virginia," began Henry, "and of the United States of America——"

"Virginia's enough."

"Never mind the United States."

"Go on, Henry."

"Fellow Americans, I do not believe, and I shall instantly and violently resent the imputation if it is made by any one else, that there is a coward, one single coward, now within the sound of my voice. I believe, and I will shed my blood if any one has the temerity to question my statement, that there is not one single coward among the gentlemen of Virginia. And, gentlemen, I do not believe there is anyone here, or anyone within the limits of my acquaintance, who can point to any act in my life that would justify him in branding me as a coward." Darton was interrupted by repeated cries of, "No, no, no, no, no." When he could again make himself heard, he continued: "But, gentlemen, if I was to take a cane and attack a man who was sitting down and so wedged in behind his desk that he could not defend himself, I should consider myself a coward."

This statement was received in silence, though the young men began to look uncertainly at each other and, as by a kind of mutual understanding, to fasten their eyes upon Barthe. Henry went on:

"I shall not, therefore, be a party to any plan that seeks to pay tribute to a coward or approve any proceeding that would brand the great state of Virginia as blind to shame and dishonor."

He turned away and found himself standing face to face with Barthe. The young men were of the same height and dressed alike, but Barthe's hair was blue-black and wavy, and his long, slender, nervous hands betrayed the intensely emotional type. They were friendly enemies of long standing, these two. They were rivals for oratorical fame and personal popularity and for Mary McArthur's favors. The last had ceased much to disturb them, for there Henry was decidedly the favorite.

At the present moment Barthe's face was flushed with rage.

"You may not know, sir," he said, "that Mr. Brooks is a relative of mine."

"No, sir," Henry answered, "I did not know that. And you will, I hope, accept my assurance that I would not knowingly belittle you or one of your relatives. But, sir, I regret, I sincerely regret to hear that the congressman from South Carolina is in any way related to you."

Barthe's voice rose angrily as he answered: "You cannot, sir, expect me to accept that as an apology or retraction. I demand more, sir, much more."

There were those among the spectators who were familiar with the violent temper that made young Darton a dangerous enemy. In his cheeks they saw, now, the red signals beginning to flame. But he surprisingly controlled his voice as he said:

"More, sir, you have no right to expect, and more I cannot give."

"More, sir, you shall be made to give," shouted Barthe.

"Now by the eternal God, if the man lives that can make me give more, produce him," cried Henry, restraint vanishing instantly.

For a moment the two boys stood glaring into each other's eyes and murder leaped between them. Then Barthe turned, stepped from the platform and walked away. Behind him he left a group of silent, terror-stricken young men from whose minds were driven out

all thoughts of Brooks and Sumner as they realized that Death was in their midst.

III

THAT afternoon Henry and Mary rode together. As they passed through the leaf-canopied paths, he told her of the scene on the campus.

"Oh, Henry," she cried, "I'm so sorry this happened. But he's nothing to you—Brooks, I mean, nor that other terrible creature Sumner, a nasty Yankee. He didn't get a blow more than he deserved."

Mary McArthur sat her horse proudly, conscious that she was a glorious creature. At this moment her blue eyes flashed while a breath of wind played with a golden lock that had escaped from beneath her hat. Even the ungainly long-skirted habit and pinched waist could not quite hide the fact that she was heroically modeled as a mate for a god.

"You're right, Mary. He's nothing to me and Sumner's a besotted Yank. I agree. But still I told the truth. It was a coward's trick."

"Oh, don't be so tragic about it. It doesn't matter. Even if he should die——" she shrugged her shoulder. "Go tell Harold you're sorry. All you have to say is, no relative of his could be a coward."

"I'd do it, Mary, I honestly would do it, if I could make myself believe it. I can't. It was cowardly and I shall always believe it was cowardly."

"Well, well, it isn't worth fighting over. Just think what may happen."

"I know well enough what may happen."

"Go to Harold."

"I can't."

"For me?"

"Ask me anything else."

"You don't love me."

"Mary! With all my heart and life I love you."

"Go to Harold."

"Have you thought what every one would say—that I was scared, that I begged off? Have you thought of that, Mary?"

The girl set her lips firmly. "No one would dare say that."

"They would. I should have to be branded as a coward or fight a dozen instead of one."

"Oh, Henry," she cried stopping her horse and turning toward him. "Is there no way out of this frightful affair?"

"None, except to go through with it."

"Why didn't you keep still? Why did you want to say those silly things?"

"Silly, to say the gentlemen of Virginia are brave?"

"Not that. You know. Oh, Henry, you mustn't get yourself killed. I couldn't stand it, I couldn't stand it."

Through the gathering dusk they returned—silent young people, brought thus to stand suddenly in the presence of their first tragic moment. Life had been, for them, a gay and fluttering thing: they saw it now seared with red, monstrous, destructive.

Mary McArthur was not shocked at the prospect of a fight. Her solicitude was wholly for her lover. Duelling was accepted as a matter of course. Doubtless had young Darton refused to fight, on the ground of higher ethics, she would no longer have known him. She would have him recognize the code—but escape; at what sacrifice to others she would not have questioned.

They parted and the light of her love went with the boy as he moved forward into the shadows.

IV

THAT evening Clinton Grey appeared for Barthe. He had been looking for Henry all of the afternoon. He was a friend to each man but one could not refuse to act in an affair of honor. He delivered the challenge. In accepting it, Henry said:

"I see no way of avoiding this duel. If Barthe wants to fight in behalf of a creature, like Brooks, I'm obliged to defend what I consider is the honor of Virginia and the South. You can say to him that never was a pistol raised in so dishonorable a cause. You can tell him, further, that I do not believe in the code, that I am opposed to it as a refuge of cowards and a disgrace to civilization. He who hides behind a gun instead of coming out openly and fighting fairly, is a disgusting creature. However, I have been born into the midst of this thing and I do not feel that I should be justified in ruining my life by refusing to accept it."

"All of that is mere bombast, Henry," Clinton said, "and of course I shan't repeat it to Harold."

"You will repeat my exact words, sir—exact. Or you will lay me under the necessity of reducing to writing what I have just said."

"I reckon, you'll have to write it then, Henry," Grey drawled.

Darton was not voicing a hurried conclusion when he said he was opposed to the code. It was but natural that his vigorous, powerful nature should resent a subterfuge. It was little more than resentment. He had no conviction that the thing was a moral and social evil. To him it was a mean, weak way of satisfying honor. He went no farther than that.

In the gray of the next morning, two young men, with instruments of death in their hands, stood facing each other. Barthe's face was white, framed by his black hair, but his eyes and lips were firm and his attitude betrayed no apprehension. Henry was slightly flushed. He was in a rage. The whole incident, from Washington to South Carolina and back to the scene in which he was engaged, angered him. His life was in jeopardy because a mean little skunk had attacked a damned loud-mouthed Yankee. The Yank deserved what he got—only it should have been administered differently.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

A handkerchief fluttered and there was the instant crack of a pistol. Barthe held in his hand the smoking weapon while Darton looked angrily at him. So while one might count three seconds they stood silent. Then Henry elevated his revolver and deliberately discharged it into the air. With a furious gesture he threw down the gun and advanced upon Barthe.

"You're satisfied now, your honor is satisfied? You've stood me up like an ox and had a shot at me—and missed, and you're satisfied. Well, I ain't. This damned refuge of cowards doesn't please me. I want something for my money. Take off your coat and fight—take it off." His hands gripped Barthe's shoulders. "Take it off before I tear it off you. You wanted this meeting and you're goin' to have it."

The seconds interfered. Things of this sort didn't happen. Preposterous. Honor was satisfied. It was no use. Darton was an insane man. By their combined strength they kept

him from Barthe, but not without damage to themselves.

"You'll have more challenges on your hands, Darton," Grey cried.

"Bring 'em on," Henry shouted. "Bring 'em on. But remember this, you duelists, that the next time I'll fight with knives. Don't forget that. No more of this child's play. Knives. And somebody'll get hurt. Bring on your challenge but set about sharpenin' your knives. If you prefer pistols to fists, I prefer knives to pistols and, by all the cringin' gods at once, that's what you'll fight with. Mark that."

His voice boomed out into the early morning, hurling his defiance at the world. Around him crashed ideals and sentiments—their shards cluttered thick at his feet. He was seeking to destroy, but his blows fell only on himself.

Thereafter he was anathema. His popularity was whisked away. He had dared to step out in the midst of a section that insisted upon standing still. He had caught a faint reflection of a truth to which his neighbors were blind. For that, they could not forgive him. Flat mediocrity is the price of applause. He had not that medium of exchange. He was ostracised.

Mary, in the flush of a girl's first love, clung to him. She found, perhaps, something alluring, fascinating in his flashing outburst of temper, in his supreme and haughty indifference, in his violent adherence to his resolve. She clung.

But at that time events were moving rapidly in Virginia. The sensation of today was lost in the alarm of tomorrow.

There came tidings one morning that set the blood pounding wildly in the veins of every slave holder. The Yanks had invaded Virginia, the black abolitionists had arrived to free the slaves, to murder the men, to inflict more terrible punishment upon the women. Harper's Ferry was captured. An appeal to the slaves to rise and massacre their masters would be made, or had already been made. The slaves would rise—they would not rise—they had risen.

Arm yourselves, lock up the black fellows, and if you see an abolitionist, shoot to kill. On to Harper's Ferry. A hot welcome for those damned murderers and cut throats.

Henry's brain caught fire and hardly waiting to arm himself he rode madly away. The small affair of John Brown and his raid was ended when he reached Harper's Ferry. The raid was at end but the insanity superinduced was not to end so quickly, was to persist, growing steadily in violence, until the hot blasts of hell had burned up a nation.

Darton fell in with Governor Wise and his party and joined them. They were on their way to see John Brown. At the mention of the name, Henry spat. The words were bitter in his mouth. The man was a devil, had been a devil all through squatter sovereignty and Kansas, and back of him were a million other devils, intent upon destroying a people. In that hated North there was no chivalry, no honor among men, no reverence for women, no regard for hospitality, no culture. A mad, money-grabbing, lying race, they were determined to sacrifice the South, her institutions, her aristocracy and her religion upon the mean altar of commercialism. He lusted to imbue his hands in the blood of these whining creatures.

They found John Brown lying on the floor. He had been, it was thought fatally, wounded and much blood still clung to him. It was thick in his long beard, and his shirt and trousers were stained with it. His wounds had been rudely and inadequately bandaged

and Henry could see that the flow of blood had not been stopped. The man's hair, which was heavy, was gray and the face was full of lines. He was old John Brown. Henry had expected to see a younger man. He was shocked to find that this murderous enterprise was the work of an ancient. He was lost in amazement at this discovery, when Brown began to talk:

"No, sir. You are wrong. There is no one back of me. God gave this work into my hands. He commissioned me to carry out His designs. There was to be no murder of the white masters. I thought the slaves would flock to me and we would find a retreat in the mountains and set up a government of our own, where men could be free and equal, without regard to color."

"Why did you attack Harper's Ferry?"

"The Lord directed me. All that I have done was done at God's command. You can understand that, sir."

"No. You have done things that God could not have directed. For instance, the killing of the old colored man on the bridge last night."

"You are right, sir. That was a mistake, I mean an accident. I am trying to be wholly honest with you, sir. I want to answer your questions fully and clearly. I have no expectation of saving my life. I would not save it if I could. To this cause I am worth more dead than alive. When I say God directed me, I mean he gave me general orders. I do not mean that I was told in detail what to do."

"But why were you willing to run the hazard, for yourself and your sons, in an enterprise of this kind, certain from the first to fail?"

"I did not believe it would fail—I don't believe it has failed. And my life and the lives of my sons were in the hands of God, to do with as He liked. Not once in a thousand years does a chance come to one of God's creatures to do His bidding as fully as I have done it. I could not miss that opportunity. I saw millions of my fellow men in slavery. God directed me to strike a blow for their freedom. I have struck that blow. And I am as sure as I am sure there is a God in Heaven that the work I have begun will continue until no man calls anyone master except God and His Son Jesus Christ."

Wounded, bleeding, his clothes in rags, his limbs bound, his followers dead or captured, the old man lay on the floor and talked calmly of victory! The light in the fanatic's eyes dazzled Henry and he covered his face with his hands. The voice, firm, throbbing with truth, still sang in his ears: "God in Heaven . . . Free and equal . . . no one Master but Christ."

Henry found himself kneeling beside the wounded figure. His slight knowledge, gained as a medical student, helped him in his efforts at readjusting the bandages. Out of his heart all hate had fled. He was the stuff and the age of which proselytes are made. "Free and equal." How often he had heard those words. They came glibly to the tongues of orators. A rich phrase. Yet he felt, as his hands drew a bandage closer, that he had just heard them for the first time in his life. In a flash of intuition he understood that they were impressive because this black abolitionist believed them.

"Thank you, sir. That's better," John Brown said as Henry regained his feet. For a moment the old man continued to stare fixedly at the young face above him. "It was for you," he said, "and for the young men like you, as much as for the negroes, that God sent

me into the South. Don't forget that. The burden of slavery rests upon the white men."

Some one had brought Governor Wise a chair and he was sitting near Brown, looking down with troubled, thoughtful eyes at the face of the man whom, a few minutes earlier, he had hated. At his side stood Colonel Lee, in whose eyes Henry could see doubt and a tremble of apprehension. They were God-fearing men, all of them, but to Brown his religion was vital, the very essence of his life. It lived and moved and dominated—for it carried God with it. The Governor of the great state of Virginia and the future soldier looked into each other's hearts and were troubled and remained silent.

To young Henry Darton the scene and the emotions it evoked were past endurance. Turning abruptly he went out into the street. He found himself in the midst of a crowd of excited men and women.

"Is the dirty dog dead?"

"Is the yellow cur dead?"

"Is the black hound of hell still alive?"

"Why don't Colonel Lee bring him out, prop him up against a wall and fill him full of lead?"

Henry heard these questions and shuddered. Silently he went his way. What had happened? He had heard a man's voice. Did he find that so terrible? Yes. He had stood in the presence of a conviction, that is to say, naked truth had passed before his eyes and the passing was devastation. He did not understand Brown. Neither did he understand the crusade the old man headed. Nevertheless, the whirlwind had driven through his soul and he found in himself only futility. What did he believe? Nothing. Even his prejudices were shattered. He had been stripped, but the material out of which he was to manufacture for himself new mental apparel had been placed in his hands. Hitherto he had lived on his emotions; had loved and hated and talked and played on the surface of his mind. Now his mind stirred, it turned over, it insisted upon being utilized, it obtruded itself. Questions raced wildly through it; he found no answers, he refused to find answers.

He mounted his horse and rode away. That which he sought to escape went with him. Suddenly he stopped and sat still, smitten with a supreme revelation: He was living in the midst of an institution for the destruction of which men were willing, gladly, to sacrifice their lives. An institution founded upon what? Justice? Love? Humanity? Right? None of those. It was horrible, and he was part of it. It was his birthright. Again he spat. This time upon his birthright. A mess of pottage? The price would be high.

Straight along that path he followed John Brown. The old man was dying for what? A nation of freemen, dedicated to freedom. A nation. Not a state. It was his first glimpse of a commonwealth beyond the state. Virginia? How could he weigh Virginia in the scales against the United States? Why should he be a Virginian? He was an American.

To fight for freedom? That was one kind of war, perhaps. To fight against freedom? That, certainly, was another kind of war. Secession and war were in the air. Could he bring himself to fight in that war? He was a Virginian and if the northern hordes—His blood no longer raced.

He went his way, but his mind whipped him. It gave him no peace during the days and weeks that followed; but, still debating, he kept his own counsel. He was sobered by his thoughts. The lightness of life vanished and it never returned.

When John Brown was hanged, he was in Harper's Ferry. He saw the old man for a moment before the execution. The abolitionist was calm, unhurried, and firm. He did not know the writings of Plato but he knew how to die like Socrates. The sting and the dread of death had been lifted. He was worth more to the cause dead than alive. He belonged to the cause and death was welcome.

Henry did not remain for the execution. As he rode homeward his face was firm. He had reached a conclusion. The destruction of life was not one of man's prerogatives. Thou shall not kill, was a conclusive mandate. He was a pacifist.

Having reached a decision, he no longer remained silent. He told Mary. She agreed that war was wrong, but she was unable to follow the logic to its final goal. At the word negro, their paths diverged. At "states' rights," she became bitter. She didn't know what "states' rights" meant exactly, but, if it suggested that anything was to be greater than Virginia, it was nonsense and no reasonable person could support so ridiculous a notion. They quarreled but they made it up only to quarrel again, for the kisses of reconciliation were sweet.

In 1860 the North, led by Seward and Lincoln, was burning towards fever heat. Henry had read the Lincoln-Douglas debates and his mind turned reverently toward Springfield. But in 1860 Virginia was no place for a man who read the speeches of Abraham Lincoln and—liked them. Such an attitude of mind, on the part of a man who owned slaves and was engaged to the most beautiful girl in the country, was intolerable.

What Darton expected, it is hard to say. Naturally, he did not stand alone. There were many people in Virginia who were opposed to secession and opposed to slavery. It may be, that Henry thought the state would not leave the union, that he would not be obliged to face the acid test, that the fury would dissipate itself as former furies had dissipated themselves. Whatever his calculations were, he made one serious oversight: He forgot that his was a personality that aroused comment. There are people about whom others talk, just as there are people whom no one ever mentions. Whatever young Darton did was food for gossip. The public would not permit him to keep his light under a bushel.

The rumors reached Mary McArthur's father. He carried them to his daughter and she confessed that in substance they were true. There was a wild scene in the McArthur home while Mary defended Henry. She did not believe he was an abolitionist and she did not believe he would desert Virginia. She admitted he wanted to set his own negroes free.

"And preaches that doctrine," McArthur shouted.

"I don't think he preaches it, father."

"How'd you know it then? Besides, it's all over the county. A damned abolitionist right in our midst. A traitor. You better tell your young man that Virginia is getting altogether too small for him."

In 1860, Virginia gentlemen knew how to hate. A glance at the face of Major McArthur as he gave this message of warning to his daughter would have been revealing. He, obviously, meant exactly what he said. Virginia was too small for Henry Darton. That the boy's education was unfinished, that his fiancée would remain in Virginia, that his property was there and his relatives and friends, were matters of no importance. He had offended against the state and her institution of negro breeding. His sentence was pronounced by the most powerful man in the county.

“I don’t believe he’s an abolitionist. I don’t believe he’s a traitor,” Mary insisted. “Won’t you give me time to find out, father? I’ll get the truth from him. Do you think I want to associate with an abolitionist and a man who hates Virginia?”

“Find out then, and don’t waste no time about it. I hope it ain’t true. And if it ain’t he’ll have to come out and show his colors. He ain’t been right since that Brooks affair, I hear.”

V

THE low sun drew out the Virginia woods in dense shadows. The lazy late calling of the birds filled the air while the murmur of a rock strewn stream served as an overtone. Low in the Southwest a mass of thunder-caps piled up, their billowing upper edges creamy-white, supported by dead black masses. Scarcely a breath of wind stirred, and the dust cloud raised by the feet of the horses upon which Henry and Mary rode hung heavy in the rear of the riders. They passed a group of negroes idly cutting up fallen trees, the sound of their voices and labor mellowed by the distance. A little farther on they moved at the edge of a field in which slaves were at work. They were happy and sang as they went indolently about their duties. Long-eared hounds raised their sad eyes to stare indifferently at the riders, and went straight to sleep again. “Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ for to carry me home,” floated around the young people, rose and fell and, as they entered the woods, died away behind them.

“Swing low, sweet chariot,” for one of these young people is nearing Eternity, is riding forward into the shadows whence no man returns.

So they passed from sight, and the woods shut them in. It was cool on the bridle path they had chosen and they rode slowly in the grateful shade of the old trees. Thus far there had been little conversation between them. When the hot pulse in their temples had quieted itself, Mary abruptly spoke of the fatal subject:

“Father says there’s sure to be war. The Yanks won’t let us be.”

“They don’t seem inclined to keep still,” Henry admitted. “But I don’t think they’ll push things as far as war.”

“You know, you’re the only one I know who thinks that. Everyone else believes it and —hopes it.”

“You can’t quarrel with me for not agreeing with everyone else, Mary.”

“I wonder if you wouldn’t rather it didn’t happen.”

“It’s no secret from you that I’m opposed to war.”

“But if they invaded dear old Virginia——”

“No danger of that, Mary, unless Virginia brings it on herself.”

“How dare you say that, and you a Virginian!”

“It’s what I feel. The South hasn’t got all the right in this quarrel.”

“It isn’t a question of right. It’s a plain truth that if the Yanks come, our men will have to fight.”

“Even though we bring the war on ourselves?”

“That has nothing to do with it. Aren’t your homes and your—your women worth fighting for?”

“I don’t believe there’ll be any attack on the women.”

“You don’t? You wouldn’t mind seeing a Yank carry me off.”

“Mary! No Yank will carry you off against your will.”

"Would you fight to keep the Yanks out of Virginia?"

"I don't believe in war."

"You wouldn't fight for your state?" The girl's face was white and the hand that held the reins was no longer steady.

Henry turned his head and looked at her as he said, "No, I wouldn't fight—not in a bad cause."

"You!" There were sting and menace in the tone, and the girl managed to give to the one word every shade of scathing insult. The young man flushed but his eyes did not leave her face. She held him for a moment with a look filled with contempt, before she said:

"You traitor. You coward. You——"

He shouted at her, in a voice that carried far through the woods, "Be careful what you say."

She laughed at him, scattering madness with the rippling sound. "Careful? Of you? You black abolitionist. Yes. You dirty Yank. Careful! There." She leaned forward and spat upon him and at the same instant her whip lashed at his face. Once more her laugh rang out and, striking her horse, she dashed away.

Instantly Darton was in pursuit. For what purpose? He did not know. Mental operations had ceased. In a similar frame of mind he would have charged a tribe of Indians. The blood lust was at work and in his frenzy he beat his horse and in a great voice called down curses on the head of the fleeing girl. The path made many turns. He took them at a breakneck speed; he gained upon the flying figure before him. A stone wall blocked her way. She struck her horse. He flew over the obstacle. Mary McArthur turned her head and laughed tauntingly at her pursuer.

Henry's horse shied at the leap. Cursing wildly, he lashed the animal back at the wall and went over in a great leap. As he did so Mary flashed by him, returning on her course, riding madly at the heap of stones over which she had just come. . . .

At this point in his recital, Uncle David paused. Bruce, sensing the climax of the story, the revelation for which he panted, found himself trembling violently, an unexpected agitation gripping him. As the old man filled his pipe, he glanced at the sideboard and Bruce rose to bring the whiskey. His uncle drank, lighted his pipe and sat smoking. Bruce remained silent; the spell of the past was upon him. The room was alive with the figures of a vanished generation; old hates and old loves were vital in the air he breathed. He could hear the hoofs of the horses striking the flints; he could see the wild girl, the insane boy, clearly outlined against the heavy Virginia foliage. He waited. The disclosure was at hand. He steeled himself for the shock.

"So far, all's clear," said Uncle David. "A nigger saw 'em ridin' hell bent for election. Couldn't see the stone wall. Nobody saw what happened there. That's the hell of it."

Bruce drew a sobbing breath. "No one? But father——"

"I tell yo' what he said. . . ."

The girl was riding for the return leap and laughing bitterly. So she laid her whip on her animal a split-second too soon and he leaped at the blow. Sprang straight into the air, caught on the top stone and came down in a heap.

Henry, still blind with rage and ignorant of the accident, swung his horse around,

raced back—and so found her. She had lost her heroic proportions and looked very small and shriveled, huddled as she was among the rocks. The echo of her laugh still rang through the forest—but she would never laugh again. The horse upon which she had ridden trotted down the road, but he would bear her upon his back no more. For a few endless seconds Darton sat upon his horse and looked down at her. Realization had not yet come to him. He expected her to sit up, to raise her head and laugh at him, to speak and denounce him. He did not know at a glance, while he remained in the saddle, that she had fallen out of Time and was already an eternity removed from him.

After he had sprung down and knelt at her side, he knew. She was past the ministration of any physician. Her hand was warm, but it was empty. The breast against which he laid his ear, had ceased to rise and fall and the heart beneath was still.

The clouds which he and Mary had noticed as they rode toward the woods had risen and as they spread over the evening sky, they brought night with them. Darkness fell swiftly around the sobbing man. Thunder pealed out; heavy drops began to fall, increased, became a torrent. The wind shrieked through the trees and the tempest beat upon the quick and the dead. He took the blanket from beneath his saddle to cover the form of his beloved; he put his coat over her; he shielded her with his body. All his efforts were in vain; he could keep her neither dry nor warm. She grew icy cold in his arms.

How long did he keep this strange tryst with death? He never knew. The fury of the storm abated. A rain-washed star showed itself, seen and lost through the leaves of his life's first cypress tree. Late at night he came to Colonel McArthur, bearing his burden of death.

Who started the rumor? No one knew. It may have been a hint from Harold Barthe, a word dropped by McArthur whose hate was fed by his grief. The rumor spread. It became no longer a rumor, but an accusation. It ceased to be a suspicion and became a fact. Henry was taken into court on the charge of murder. There were heated arguments, but no evidence. He was discharged. In the minds of Colonel McArthur and his friends, the Scotch verdict, "not proved," held sway. They would have phrased it: "Guilty, but freed for want of evidence." . . .

"That's what yo' wanted," said Uncle David. "All I know about it. All anybody knows. Shall I go on?"

"Yes," said Bruce. "There's another point—go on. I want it all. . . ."

McArthur couldn't let matters rest in that unsatisfactory state. He had damned Henry before Mary's death. He had additional cause for damning him now. He made no secret of his feeling and his words were carried to Darton who put a curb upon his temper and his pride and went to talk to the Colonel. They faced each other, those two, standing at all points opposed. One had grown gray in the reverence for his state and solid in his belief that slavery was divinely instituted and right. That new word, "Republican," was for him a synonym for everything vile and mean and hard and dishonest. It was heresy, sacrilege and crucifixion. He was a warrior and the world's evils were to be righted only by the death and destruction of thousands of his fellow men. He was a fire eater and the bloody shirt was nailed to his masthead.

The other did not believe a part was greater than the whole; doubted the justice of God if slavery carried His sanction and questioned the right of man to commit murder.

One had lived out the fever of life; had loved and fought and laughed; had made merry and raged and mourned and—was stricken with a great grief. The other was stepping into the high tide of the world's ways, was smitten with a furious zest of life, but he had loved and lost and was crushed in the presence of emptiness. He was baffled by misunderstanding and bewildered by man's inhumanity.

Colonel McArthur looked angrily at his young caller. "I have nothing to say to you, sir."

"But there are things I should like to say to you, sir. You will understand that the death of your daughter——"

"My daughter's name is not to be mentioned by you."

Darton flushed but bowed his acquiescence. In a moment he continued: "You have accused me of being an abolitionist. If by abolition you mean the violent freeing of the slaves, you are wrong, sir. But if you mean——"

"On this problem there are no shades of opinion, It's white or black. You, sir, are black."

The blood rushed to Henry's face. By an effort he kept control of himself. However, his voice trembled slightly as he asked: "You don't believe, then, that there can be an honest difference of opinion?"

"I emphatically do not. Those who ain't with us are against us. As your black Republican rail splitter says, it's a house divided against itself. Your place, feelin' as you do, is up North with that gang of cutthroats and pirates and hypocritical psalm singers. Your place ain't in Virginia. I reckon I wouldn't stay here much longer if I was you."

For an instant the two big men stood eye to eye and in that stare were revelation and murder. Thereafter they understood each other. Henry knew that McArthur would spare no pains to compass his ruin and that his death would be a highly desired consummation. McArthur knew that Darton could not be brushed aside with words. It might be that he was opposed to war but he was ready to fight and there was no tinge of yielding or cowardice in the high look of that young eye. A half-glow of admiration for the boy burned in the old man's heart but his frown did not relax and he turned his back upon Henry as the last drop in the poison of insult.

Henry rode home and as he went he drank gall and wormwood. Here was no freedom for white or black. One was shackled in limb, the other in mind. One could not go where he liked; the other could not think what he pleased. One was bound to a man, the other to an institution. What was it John Brown had said: "The burden of slavery rests upon the white man."

Half a mile from home, Henry stopped and removing the bit from the animal's mouth he tied the reins to a sapling and proceeded to the house on foot. Thereafter, every night he kept a horse hidden in the woods, saddled and ready for instant use. Alone in his room, he took from a drawer a sheaf knife which was carried on a belt. This he buckled around him, so that the weapon hung on the left side and was hidden by his trousers.

During the few remaining days, he went about his business with a calm face, stoically masking his impatience. The delay did not cause him to slacken in his caution. He knew the attack would come and that when it came, he would, if possible, fight his way out and escape, but some strange kink of pride made him resolve to remain until violently driven

forth.

It was Mary McArthur's brother, a boy of sixteen, who brought him word of the impending assault. The boy, believing in Henry and loving him, was terrified at his father's plans.

"Dad says you killed Mary," he sobbed. "Oh, Henry, you didn't do it, I know you didn't do it. They're goin' to kill you. At first they were only goin' to drive you away, but Harold Barthe told Dad something and Dad swore then he'd kill you. He said no jury would hang you and he'd take the law into his own hands. Don't let him kill you, Henry. He'd be awful sorry afterwards. Dad's all right when he ain't in a temper. Go away, go away now so they can't find you. I don't want Dad to kill you and I know if Mary was here she'd say the same thing. Please, won't you get away quick, Henry?"

"You go home, Ted. Never mind about me. I'll take care of myself. Go along, now, they mustn't find you here. Quick, out this way. Don't forget me, Ted, and grow up to be a whole lot better man than I am. Git now, fast."

Who can tell what happened? It was night and the terrified negroes stayed in their own quarters. They heard shouts and groans and curses and the loud report of fire arms. There was the rush of swiftly passing feet and silence.

In the yard were three men, standing around a fallen form, trying to relight an extinguished lantern. Their smoking rifles were lying at their feet and they were dazed by the cataclysmic nature of the scene through which they had just passed. Henry had come out at their call, quietly. And then—he had kicked out the lantern and thrown himself upon them. Their rifles, which they fired aimlessly, were of no use. Darton had struck out furiously and, freed from detaining hands, had fled.

By the faint glow of their relighted lantern, they saw Harold Barthe lying at their feet, dead. A rifle ball had torn an upward way through his left shoulder and death had come to him instantly. Yet the man who had come out to them had carried no rifle. Colonel McArthur looked at his friends and did not speak. They looked at the dead man and at each other and no one dared ask the question that rose in the mind of each. After all, it was the Colonel who first spoke.

"If this deed was done by the black nigger freer who has just escaped us, I want, here and now, to vow my life to the task of trackin' him down and ending his worthless existence."

Each of his friends extended a hand. "Me, too," each said.

"It's a compact," said McArthur. "I don't see no other way of clearin' ourselves."

Yes, there was the rub. If Darton fired the fatal shot he deserved to die for the deed and their consciences need not trouble them. If he were innocent, some one of the three had been guilty of frightful carelessness—or worse. . . .

"I got this from Ted McArthur," David explained to Bruce. "Colonel tried to pass the feud on to his son. Ted wouldn't have it. Been lots of blood shed by then. It was that doubt saved Henry in Indianapolis. Tried to make him say he killed Barthe. Got into an argument among themselves. Gave Henry a chance to fight his way out. Colonel died. That ended it."

"But, Uncle David, who did kill Barthe?"

"Don't know. Somebody good deal shorter than Barthe, way the bullet went."

"Did father——"

"Never talked much about it. Said once he knew who done it. I don't know."

"Haven't you a suspicion, nothing?"

"What good's a suspicion? It wasn't Henry. Sure of that. Yes, I got an idea. Ain't worth much. Put a lot of things together—what Henry said, what Ted said. Ted was all right. War ruined him. He'd been a big man. Got into Congress late in life. Died before anybody heard of him. Yes. Idea's no good. Miles wide, maybe. Can't do any harm now. Think Ted did it. Thought a lot of Henry. Just damned fool notion of mine."

Ted! It was an illuminating thought. The boy had dared everything for his friend. Had dared greatly when he brought his warning, had staked his life on a thread, when, hidden in the shrubbery, he had tried to help the one fighting against four. "He would have been a big man." As a boy, he loomed now in Bruce's eyes, colossal, a figure around which legends should play and whose life was fit for the signer of an epic.

Bruce harked back. His primary interest was elsewhere, and his original question was not yet answered.

"About Mary, Uncle David. The horse stumbled?"

"How do I know? That's what your father said."

"But did you believe him?"

"Yes. Why not? Only reasonable thing to believe. Man don't kill a woman for spittin' on him. Ought to, though. . . ."

VI

JACK stirred in his crib and Bruce paused to look at the flushed, sleeping face. His son! He was filled with the story of his father and paternity moved in him. What would this child think when, grown to manhood, he thought, as Bruce was now thinking, of his father? There was something brave and alluring back of the nomad whom Bruce had known. That gray, wandering man whom his childish lips had called "Father" had suffered much for his ideals, had spent his life aimlessly, uprooted, thrust out of his native soil. He had opposed slavery and slavery had passed. He had opposed war and, surely, war, a great war was no longer possible. Those things in which he most ardently believed, freedom and peace, were accomplished.

Bruce considered himself while he hung over the form of his son. He was older than his father had been at the time of his momentous decision. The minutes turned black for him; in himself he could find no convictions, no cemented beliefs for which he was willing to die, for which he was willing to sacrifice his place, his wife and his child. For what ideal could he be tempted to do battle that the world might be a pleasanter place for this infant for whose existence he was responsible? What heritage of daring could he bequeath his son? What was there for him of strife and endurance that should mask from his son's eyes his weaknesses and failures and selfishness and mistakes?

His quest led him to emptiness and this emptiness bred a yearning in his heart. This was his son, his responsibility, his pledge, his hostage. His life belonged to this boy. He had no other faculty but that of giving himself for his child. Something strange and sweet and beautiful flowered in his soul: he had fallen in love with his son.

He retired on that thought and lay for long, in the darkness, pondering that which had occurred within him. A psychoanalyst might have explained to him that it was an unconscious transference of affection from his father to his son. It may be that the analyst would have been right. Or it may be that this love had been slowly developing on the fringe of consciousness and, under the stress of emotion and introspection, broke into the active life of the mind. No matter. It was there, a live dominant emotion. Bruce's pillow was wet with his tears, but they were not tears of pain.

At breakfast Cora noticed a change in Bruce and was irritated. She attributed it to emotions induced by Uncle David's talk. She decided she would be glad when David went away. Bruce was too easily moved. One could never tell what nonsense might get into his head nor what silly thing he would do if something stirred him. He was irresponsible. There was the affair with that girl, a yellow-haired hussy. . . .

Bruce was night City Editor at the time. It was very late and he was closing his desk to go home when the "yellow-haired hussy" came in. She was almost beautiful, but tarnished. Her hair was a light gold and her eyes were large and blue, but she was draggled and her dress had lost its freshness. Her poor little willow plume drooped sadly.

"Are you the City Editor?" she asked. Her voice was low, throaty.

"The night City Editor."

"Oh. My brother's a newspaper man in Mason City. That's why I came in. Newspaper

men are always doin' things for people. I thought you'd help me."

"How can I help you?"

"I want to go home."

"To Mason City?"

"Yes. I ain't got any money."

"Have you been in Minneapolis long?"

"No. Three weeks."

"Why did you come? What have you been doing?"

She raised her head and looked at him, a hard light in her eyes. "D'you want the truth? Can you stand it?"

"I don't want you to tell me anything you'd rather not tell. I have no right to question you. If you tell me anything, I guess the truth will do."

"All right. Remember you asked for it. I'm a street walker. There, you got it flat. I come up here with a man. Oh, he didn't lie to me, though that's what I'd say if some bull pinched me and I got took into court. No, I knew what I was doin'. I wanted to come. Mason City was an awful pokey burg. Gawd, I'd like to be back there this minute. He didn't throw me down, this guy. I quit him and bein' free, white and away from home, I went on the street. I give that life a good try-out. It's a hell of a way to live. I want to go back slingin' hash, chinnin' the fresh drummers and gettin' ten berries ev'ry Saturday night."

"Do you honestly want to go home?"

"Say, do I look as though I was makin' this spiel as a stall? What sort of game would I be up to? I thought newspaper men was smart. I guess if I wanted to stay on the street I could make a livin' and may be in time I could save enough mazuma to buy me a ride home. Maybe. But I want to go now, before the fit wears off. Get me?"

"Yes. How much do you need?"

"I owe a little room rent. I guess a twenty would fix me."

"I'm sorry, I haven't twenty dollars with me. But if you'll wait until I go home, I'll get it from my wife and bring it back to you. Can you do that?"

"Your what?"

"My wife."

"Say, listen: D'you mean you'd wake the Missus up this time in the morning and tell her to shell out a twenty for a dame like me? She'd probably bust you one, and I wouldn't blame her. Neither would the judge."

Bruce laughed. "Don't worry. She'd understand, and be glad we could help you."

"My Gawd, but you're a trustin' baby! Or you got the one female in all the world to swear by."

"Never mind about that. If you'll wait I'll go get the money."

"Nix, Mr. City Editor. Keep your change. I ain't goin' to get no white guy into trouble, and I'll get out in the middle of the street and tell the passing multitude you're white. Nope. You leave the Missus slumber and I'll toddle along. I ain't worth wakin' up a decent woman for. Ta ta, and thanks just the same."

“Please don’t go. Can’t you believe that I know it will be all right? We want to help you. I should be miserable if you left now.”

The girl, who had turned wearily away, stopped and looked at Bruce. “Say, you’re a new kind of bug to me. I guess your kind ain’t so plentiful—not where I travel, it ain’t. All right. Have it your own way, Mister. I’ll linger.”

Bruce took up his hat, but hesitated. “I hate to leave you. May be you’ll beat it while I’m gone.”

“Oh, I’ll stick around all right, all right,” she assured him. “And take your time. I ain’t got nothin’ to do between now and train time.”

“Fine. Make yourself comfortable. I’ll tell the man in the elevator that you are waiting for me, so he won’t bother you when he comes in to shovel out the waste paper.”

Cora, wakened out of a sound sleep, was not inclined to lend a ready ear to Bruce’s account of the golden girl. She raised objections but when she found that Bruce had promised to return with the money, she yielded, experience having taught her that it was impossible to persuade him to violate his plighted word. But she was annoyed. She was also distinctly jealous. She sat up, put her feet out of bed and said:

“Wait. I’ll go with you.”

“Cora! There’s no use in that.”

“May be not, but I’m going.”

“I think it’s an absurd idea, but if you like——”

“I decidedly do like.”

They found the girl drooping over Bruce’s desk, the picture of exhausted youth. When she saw that a woman accompanied Bruce she drew away from them with a frightened movement, her bravado falling from her.

“This is my wife,” Bruce explained. “She came with me, to see if there was anything further we might do for you.”

“Bruce!” Cora said sharply and turned her back upon the girl.

“Yes, she did—not,” the outcast said and laughed, a harsh note getting into her mirth. “Didn’t I tell yo’ to let her sleep. Oh, boy, what a lot you got yet to find out about women!”

“Please!” Bruce said. “Please, don’t say things like that. Take this now and we wish you all the luck in the world.”

“Take it, take her money? Not in a thousand years. Starvin’ is easy to gettin’ by that way. You’re a real gent and I’m for yo’ but give the lady back her twenty bones and forget it.”

“It’s my money I’m offering you. Please take it. It’s comparatively a small favor I’m asking. Won’t you take it?”

“Say, listen, Bo. I don’t know what’s the matter with you, but there’s something wrong some place or I’ve gone nuts. All right I’ll take it, and I’ll use it like I said. And you’ll know it, too, ’cause I’ll send it back to you. Thanks. You’ve done something tonight. But for Gawd’s sake, get wise, get wise. I don’t know nothin’ but yo’ got to hand it to me, I know my own sect all right, all right. Well, so long. I don’t hold no grudge against the Missus. She’s right. I’d a done the same in her place only most likely I’d a

popped a flatiron offen your bean in the bargain."

She left them without another word. . . .

Something in the expression of Bruce's face as he sat at breakfast brought that night back to Cora's mind. It was a clear reading of an emotional upheaval tending toward some form of self-sacrifice. Why, she asked herself, why in heaven's name, couldn't he be like other men? Why must he be constantly feeding himself on something new, wiping out the past, stressing today something of which, yesterday, he had never thought? Like taking money that they really needed to give to a street walker. Yes, she had returned it, but heaven only knew how she had earned it. Slinging hash, she said. A vulgar creature. He had never repeated that particular outrage at any rate. She could take this nonsense out of his head, too, if she only knew what it was. That was the trouble. He'd consummate his idiocy before she found out about it. Then it was too late. Oh, for a quiet, steady man who believed today the things he had believed last week! There'd be some comfort in life with such a husband.

"Are you worried about anything, Bruce?" she asked.

"Worried? No, I guess not. Why?"

"I don't know. You look, oh, different—as though you had something on your mind."

"I have. Do you know, Cora, I've just found out something."

"I thought so. What is it this time?"

"This time? When before did I make a sudden discovery?"

"Oh, dozens of times. What is it now?"

"I'm awfully fond of Jack. It came to me last night when I was going to bed."

"Well, for heaven's sake! That's certainly startling! Fond of your own son." Cora threw back her head and laughed. Back of her peals of sarcastic merriment, Bruce heard the faraway echo of Mary McArthur's taunting laugh the instant before the horse fell.

"Is that funny?" he asked. "Maybe. I don't know. But he was such a darling when I saw him in his crib last night and I think for the first time I got a glimpse of what my responsibility towards him means. I can't leave him a great name, or wealth, but I can spend my life giving him a chance to win for himself the things he most wants. That's what I decided last night. It doesn't matter about me. I can't see any purpose now, except to work for him. I've taken him rather casually so far. You were right when you twitted me about it last evening. But I've found out what he means to me, and I won't be indifferent again."

So that was to be the new rôle. The devoted father! Off on another tangent. It was like him. And he'd play this hard. He played everything hard. Let him. It would be irritating but it would have its compensations. Probably he would interfere with all that was done for Jack, but he would work and be careful to keep his job. Fond of his son! The man was ridiculous, but he was amusing. At any rate, his present vagary furnished her no ground for worry.

VII

BRUCE and Uncle David sat enjoying a farewell smoke. The old man would start for Ohio the next morning, passing forever out of Bruce's life. He had appeared for an instant out of a vague past, had materialized himself as a form and an utterance, had become distinct as a symbol of a remote age; he had vivified, for Bruce, a shadowy people. It was as though he had created a world of men and women. He was now on the point of tearing down this world, of packing away in their dusty cases the animated figures into whom he had breathed the breath of life.

Bruce viewed sadly the devastation thus in process. He hungered for the brave men and spirited women who had passed through the cyclonic days in America's history. The one link that connected him with that period was old and worn and would soon be distant.

Uncle David smoked and was silent. His every faculty seemed concentrated on the act of absorbing pleasure from his pipe. Could he be set going once more, transplanted into the midst of those stirring scenes? Could he be made to strike, with his laconic speech, life out of death?

"You hadn't finished your story, Uncle David. What happened after Father escaped from McArthur and his friends?"

"Nothin' much. War come along."

"Tell me. It's my last chance."

"Want to hear? Henry talked—once. No hand to gabble about himself. Can't hurt anybody now. All right, then. Had his horse tied out in the woods, remember? Wise thing to do. Old McArthur put the hounds on his track. . . ."

Time was lost in getting the dogs, but while they were being brought, grim men searched the premises. The negroes were routed out and pressed into service. They were driven into obscure and possible hiding places, but the fugitive was not found. The hounds, long-eared and sad-eyed, were given the scent and went off, baying, into the night.

When Henry closed in on the four men and his hand moved swiftly to the haft of his knife, he thought only of Harold Barthe. The roar of the guns had come simultaneously with his attack and Barthe had slipped from his grasp. This was his time to escape and swiftly he fled into the kindly darkness. He ran to his tethered horse, sprang into the saddle, guided the animal carefully to the turnpike, set his head to the West and gave him a free rein. Three miles farther on the horse shied and, reined sharply back, he slipped and came down never to rise again.

Darton was stunned by the fall, but recovering quickly, a brief examination convinced him that the horse was injured past aid. He removed his saddle-bags and slinging them over his shoulder he set out on foot for the distant mountains and safety.

Dawn came like a frightened friend and found him resolutely following his course. At sunrise he paused and ate from his saddle-bags and drank from a gurgling creek. He leaned his wearied back against a tree and closed his eyes. His rest was brief. From afar,

borne to him on the eastern breeze, came the baying of hounds. He sat straight and listened and the bitterness of all time passed, in that moment, into his soul. He was being hunted as runaway negroes were hunted, he, the eldest son of an old family. He was pursued as a common felon, dogs were chasing him from his native state. He who had dreamed high dreams of service and fondly seen his name blazoned on the pages of Virginia's history, would be henceforth a man without a state, without family, without friends. As he sat, the newly risen sun shining on his bowed head, he became Ishmael, for all of his days a wanderer on the face of the earth, a stranger among the sons of men.

He rose, picked up his saddle-bags and stepped into the creek from which he had just drank. This water had nourished him, now it must save him. Swiftly he followed the stream towards its source and the friendly brook smoothed out the imprint of his boots and baffled the pursuing dogs.

A tributary came in from the northwest and he abandoned the main stream to follow the small feeder which flowed through an impenetrable wilderness and had cut for itself banks higher than a man's head. He appreciated the danger of thus entering an uninhabitable jungle, but he did not hesitate. Hour after hour he walked in the water of the narrow creek; now it barely covered the soles of his boots, and now it was waist deep.

The sun was high in the heavens, an intolerable heat enveloped him, insects swarmed around his head, his feet were swollen and painful: he pushed on. Not once did he leave the stream or lay a hand on its bank. At noon he sat down in the water and ate and rested. He did not remain seated long and all the hot, poisonous afternoon, he drove himself forward, walking painfully in the water.

Night came down and discovered him in the midst of a vast morass, an endless thicket, through which no man could fight his way. He crawled to the top of the brook's bank and lay down, too exhausted to eat. But there was no immediate rest for him. Mosquitoes by the millions attacked him. With his last strength he gathered a few dry sticks and started a fire which he covered with green branches and heavy leaves, smothering it into a smudge. In the midst of the delivering smoke he again lay down, free of the piping pests. Instantly he was asleep and wakened only when the dying smudge gave him into the hands of his enemies. He renewed the smudge and again slept.

Cold and sore and pain-racked and hungry he wakened at dawn. Opening his saddle-bags was an heroic task, eating was an effort and climbing down the bank into the water was a frightful and stupendous undertaking. To set one screaming foot before the other and advance slowly required the last fraction of will power, whipped by a keen desire to live. He went forward. He did not lie down and die in the death trap into which he had deliberately penetrated. He went forward through a gloom never pierced by the sun, stung by a multitude of winged, voracious fiends, treading on feet that had suffered past the point of acutest agony. He went forward while the air he breathed grew hot and rank, and noisome odors of the jungle poisoned him. He went forward when the sun was high overhead and even the birds were silent, panting in their nests.

Time ceased for him; eternity abided over his ditch. He ate blindly, he drank of the water in which he sat. He went forward, following a crazy lane of water that rose and fell and whirled hither and thither in a mad dance with the gyrating trees. In this weird and fantastic upheaval of nature he was thrown from bank to bank, fell on his face, was jerked to his feet, hurled forward.

This sinister conduct of things persisted during the entire afternoon. Twilight settled over the hideously frisking forest; night was at hand. He wanted to stop, he was ready to end the struggle, he had no wish to live in so mad a world. He could not stop; his feet went forward, propelled by the undulating bed of the stream. It became amusing. He was sliding down a great incline and had lost control of his movements. No matter. He lent himself to this swift descent. He would land on a grassy bank near a small house that waltzed majestically with giant oaks. . . .

He was in bed and the light of a high sun flooded his room. He was a mass of bruises, from his head to his feet he ached. But he was alive and he was resting. He was hungry, and a kind old woman brought him food while children crowded around the door of his room and stared at him. They were poor white trash, but they were human. They nursed him back to health and strength, they guided him to a farm where he could buy a horse and they told him good-by with regret. The forest had delivered him into their hands and they and the forest were friends. Hail and farewell. He never saw them again.

So ended the difficult part of his escape. He rode into Ohio and that fall entered the medical school at Columbus. Lincoln was elected in November and all the bitter winter of ’61 he heard nothing but talk of war. In the spring he was admitted to the practice of medicine in Ohio and after the fall of Fort Sumpter he entered the service as an assistant surgeon. . . .

“But that was with an Ohio regiment,” Bruce said, “and so how did he get to Minnesota and meet my mother?”

“Damn’ fool trick. Should’ve been shot. Fell in with Grant. Got to be friends. Mussed ’round together. Quarreled. Henry rode off. Left the army flat. Thousands did it. No great harm. Met your mother. Married. Went back in the Sixth Minnesota. Got himself wounded. Sent to the Washington Hospital at St. Louis. That’s all.”

“But there wasn’t time—I mean to meet Mother, court her and get married and be back in the army so quickly.”

“Time? Things like that didn’t take long in them days. Drifted into Winona and there. . . .”

A mere village on the west shore of the Mississippi. There was some lumber business and the scattered farmers brought in their grain to be sent away in flatboats on the bosom of the Father of Waters. Small enough for the entrance of a man like Darton to attract attention. The girls fluttered—all but Matilda Allan. She was quiet and small and looked out with honest gray eyes upon a world that she found amusing. This handsome, full-bearded stranger was too dignified—she laughed at him. They met and his voice sang in her ears and the laughter died out of her heart. He chose her for his partner during the evening and he took her home.

The next day they went riding and a new and strange sensation gripped at the girl’s heart.

The man was bewildered by his own conduct. The girl had laughed at him and he had courted her to revenge himself for her conduct—but he fell in love with her. Why? He had thought that love had died with Mary McArthur and women had been the lightest playthings to him since that time. Here was one not big as Mary had been, not dominant, not vividly alive. The antipodes of Mary. Yet he forgot her laughter and loved her. Almost

at once, they were engaged.

Who was he? What was he? Whence came he? Only Darton could answer these questions and he would not. His speech was Southern and the sections were at war. Suspicion raised its head. Judge Allan was emphatic in his opposition and commanded Matilda to send the man about his business. She did not do so. Darton remained, doing nothing, no patients coming to him.

A committee, headed by Judge Allan visited him and told him plainly he was suspect. They flatly accused him of being a spy, though what there was at Winona to attract a Southern spy, the members of the committee could not have said. Darton laughed at them and turned the tables by showing them that he had just received his appointment as assistant surgeon of a Minnesota regiment then forming. They were abashed and withdrew; but Judge Allan was only strengthened in his determination that Matilda should give up the intruder. His commands were issued to the whirlwind. A week later they were married, and Henry joined his regiment and marched away.

"Got it all now," said Uncle David. "Good thing. Time to stop talkin'."

"Uncle David, one question: Why didn't father ever go back to Virginia?"

"Hound dogs," said Uncle David. "I know. Just hound dogs. Read your books." And that was his last word on the strange history of a man who had fled from his native state with the baying of bloodhounds as the last sound in his ears and who had won fearfully through to safety with the blackness of a great shame shadowing him.

VIII

THINGS were not going well at the office. Something had gone out of Bruce. It was perhaps maturity fighting its way to the surface and lending emphasis to his antipathy for the business. He did his work but it lacked verve; the dash that had characterized it a year before was gone. Bruce was not blind to this condition but he was powerless to remedy it. His nights were haunted by terrible dreams of his mother and his waking thoughts were centered on his son. Between the two distractions he failed as an executive.

Hamblin was considerate. He was forced to relieve Bruce but he did not want to lose him. He gave him the title of Assistant Managing Editor and put him in charge of the Sunday paper. Bruce was not deceived by this apparent promotion. He knew that it came because he had failed, but he did not despair. He thought in time he could win back the lost vigor, re-establish himself in Hamblin's opinion—if only the dreams would stop. They persisted. It occurred to him, then, that a change of scene might bring relief. He cast about for an eastern paper the staff of which he might join. It was purely a random choice that set him to write to General Agness of the *Baltimore American*.

Surprisingly his letter was kindly received. The correspondence continued and he was advised that a place could be found for him. In his final letter he mentioned forty dollars a week as the salary he expected. He resigned from the *Tribune*, to Hamblin's obvious relief, and with Cora and Jack went North for a three weeks' rest. The understanding was that he would join *The American* on July first.

Cora had made no real objection to the proposed change. She had been seriously distressed when he lost his place as City Editor but the wound was in her pride as he suffered no loss of salary. What did she think when he proposed Baltimore? Excited by the prospect of seeing a new city? Perhaps. Yet it was she who suggested that he go alone and that she and Jack follow only after he was established. Bruce agreed, facing unflinchingly the drab days of separation from Jack.

In the country he rested, but his animation did not return, the freshness was gone from his eyes. The dreams that made sleep a dreadful experience, constantly recurred, but he still clung to the belief that an entire change would dispel them.

Late in June he received a telegram from General Agness. There was no place for him on the *American*. He put the message aside and two days later started East. From Chicago, he traveled on the Baltimore and Ohio, which wandered rather aimlessly through Ohio, wound through Cumberland, Washington and gave him up at last in Baltimore.

Ten minutes after arriving in the city he telephoned to General Agness.

"What Darton?" the secretary asked.

"Darton, of Minneapolis."

General Agness took the 'phone. "Didn't you get my wire?"

"Yes. But I decided to come anyway."

"Very well. Come and see me."

At the *American* building, an elevator carried him to the twelfth floor, and he was shown into the General's room. A short, heavy man, with a fierce white moustache, greeted him.

"Sit down," said General Agness. "I confess I am surprised to see you." Bruce discovered a trace of a foreign accent. The general's French was still part of him.

"You wanted me at one time and I wanted to come East. There seemed nothing to do but take the chance of finding a place with you."

"It was your price scared us off."

"Never mind about that. Pay me whatever you like."

"We don't have many high-priced men. What would you say to twenty-five dollars?"

"Accept it."

So he was engaged and assigned to the telegraph desk. He returned to the hotel and wrote Cora of his success. Afterwards, sitting in the lobby, he got into conversation with a man named Richardson who, it developed, was locally celebrated as a genealogist. Upon learning Bruce's name, he asked:

"Any relatives in Virginia?"

"My father was a Virginian."

"Exactly. I know the family. The founder arrived in this country in 1708. It proved to be a great family, down to the Civil War. It went to pieces then, like many another of the best families in America. All true men and spirited women, all of them except one. There was one renegade who ran away just before the war started, or got chased away. He had the audacity, sir, to enlist in the Northern army. Yes, sir."

"I know," said Bruce. "He was my father."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Richardson cried. "I didn't know, naturally I couldn't know. I am very sorry."

"You needn't apologize. I have gone into his history, and I find nothing of which to be ashamed."

"Hem, well, you doubtless are acquainted with more of the facts than I am. Won't you join me in a drink?"

"Thank you, no. I don't drink."

"What! A Darton of Virginia and don't drink. Sir, you amaze me. You are running contrary to nature. You are destroying the work of a lifetime, shattering a belief nurtured for many years. I have in my ignorance fondly believed that blood will tell. You confront me with a piece of evidence that is diametrically opposed to that theory. I am overwhelmed. You don't drink."

"You can make yourself easy, Mr. Richardson. There were unusual circumstances. Besides, I don't mind confessing to you that my father drank enough for the whole family."

"That I can easily believe, but it does not save you. Sir, you are an enigma. No offence meant. And you can accept my unsupported word, sir, that you will yet do your share of drinking."

"That's possible. I am released from my vow."

"Your vow? To what do you refer?"

"No matter. I admit I have no desire to drink, but I am free to do so if I choose."

"I do not follow you but it is of no consequence. I shall live, I trust, to see you taking your liquor like a man."

Bruce found the trivial experience illuminating. It furnished an additional, tiny light turned upon that past with which he had, recently, so intensely lived.

In a few days he had settled into the routine of the office, learned that his work was satisfactory and was told, casually, that he had a life job if he wanted to keep it. That seemed likely. He could think of no better place in which to raise his son and for himself he was without ambition. He wanted more money, but that was sure to come and meanwhile he had enough. Every week he sent Cora fifteen dollars and found he could live comfortably on the remaining ten.

Two things, only, disturbed his placidity at that time: The dreams that had driven him from Minneapolis visited him in Baltimore, and he was heart hungry for his son. As the separation lengthened, he discovered that his feeling toward Cora was of resignation. He gave over expecting the flame of love to rekindle itself. He accepted the burden of fault as his own, but that did not remedy the situation. They were parted and he could conceive of no magic that could work a regeneration so they might move forward together, haloed with an aureole of rapture.

In the fall he wrote an editorial on the race riots which had just taken place at Springfield, Illinois. He gave his brief essay to the editor-in-chief and on the strength of it the writing of an occasional editorial was added to his duties. For this he received a small increase in salary.

It was then he wrote for Cora, who came at once. Again he held his son in his arms, again he looked into the eyes of his wife. In their brown velvet depths he saw traces of affection, but the fine glow that had once enthralled him had vanished.

Now began for Bruce a strange period in his life. It can be understood only on the assumption that he was starved for love. He had given his mother the full affection of a younger son and he had been prodigal of a romantic love for Ellen. He had loved Cora, but death and time had destroyed those threads and he stood in the midst of a cold, indifferent world with no one around whom his life could revolve, whom he could raise up and worship as a creature touched with divinity. Adoration should have gone to his wife, but that had become impossible. Hence this thwarted threefold love, knitted into one powerful emotion, was directed toward his son.

Day by day the passion grew, more and more absorbed him, and at last so possessed him that in the presence of his baby, he was humbled and his hands went out reverently to touch the curl-crowned head.

With this love suffusing him, his days were pleasant and he went contentedly about his work. And the dreams that had troubled his nights ceased to visit him. Out of this quiet happiness was born a renewed desire to write. As his duties at the office left him three free hours each day, he went seriously at the task of writing stories. Never did a man labor at a typewriter with more unselfish motives. It was for Jack. Whatever came of it belonged to his son.

Day after day he toiled away, the old romantic spirit demanding expression. Week

after week, he produced a story, sent it to the *Saturday Evening Post* and immediately received it back. He was not discouraged; he was buoyant, and his confidence ran rampant.

"I'll hit it yet," he told Cora. "You'll see. It's only a question of trying hard enough, and I'm sure sometime to get on the right track."

"I should think so," Cora agreed, "if you keep at it. But it seems too bad to waste all that time and effort."

"Maybe it won't prove wasted. It won't if I land at last."

For three months he worked with uninterrupted devotion to his self-imposed task. In that time he wrote thirteen short stories and not one of them elicited an expression even of interest from an editor. His resolve was as firm and his hope as high when he finished the last story as they had been when he sat down to compose the first of the grim thirteen.

His effort in that direction was stopped by Jack's illness. He came in to find Cora on the verge of hysterics and wildly demanding a doctor.

White-faced, he ran into the street. Where could he find a doctor? Baltimore was full of them but where were they and in whose hands could he trust his son? He had not required the services of a doctor, had no experience of them, did not know who was good and who was worthless nor where he should look for their offices. Across North Avenue was a drug store. Surely information could be obtained there. He hurried in.

"Where can I find a doctor? My baby's sick."

The clerk looked at him kindly. "Your baby? Wait a minute." He stepped to the door and called, "Doctor Philips. Here's a man wants to see you." As he came back he said, "You're in luck. Dr. Philips is a specialist in child diseases and far and away the best in Baltimore."

A little round, fat man, with twinkling kindly eyes left the motor car into which he had been entering and came into the store. Bruce stepped up to him.

"My child is sick," he said. "We live just across the street. Will you come and see him?"

"Of course. I'll get my case out of the car." He got his case and together they crossed the street and ascended to the room in which Jack lay. Dr. Philips examined the child and then raised a smiling face to the anxious father and mother. "It's nothing," he told them. "He has overeaten or eaten something that didn't agree with him and he has a touch of fever. You'll find he'll be perfectly well tomorrow."

That night when Bruce came home from the office, Cora, unexpectedly, was waiting up for him.

"I got such a shock when I thought Jack was seriously ill, that I couldn't sleep," she said. "Oh, Bruce, it's terrible. So far away from home and if he got sick or—or if anything happened to him, what could I do?"

"I understand. You are a long way from home."

"And I hate this place, Bruce. I hate it. It's dirty and hot and awful. It must be unhealthy, I know it's unhealthy."

"Their records don't show that."

"I don't care a bit for their records. And you shouldn't either, caring for Jack as much

as you pretend to."

"That's just why I do care. If the place were really unhealthy——"

"It is, I tell you. Don't you suppose I know? You don't, of course. You think I'm a fool and will be a burden to you when you get to be a great man. I know. I can see what you are thinking when you sit there writing that stuff—that never sells and never will sell and all the time dreaming about what you'll do when you get to be famous. You needn't think I can't follow your mental kinks."

"I never once thought of being famous, Cora. I did think I might make some money with them, but that was for Jack—and you."

"For me! That's a fine one. You haven't wasted a thought on me for a year."

"You don't know, Cora. It isn't fair to say that."

"Have you? Did you think of me when you used to go out and spend half the night with another woman? Did you think of me when you threw up your job on the *Tribune* and dragged me down here where my life and my baby's life are constantly in danger? That looks as though you had wasted a lot of time planning for my happiness, doesn't it?"

"You know why I left Minneapolis, Cora. I've told you before."

"Oh, a lot of silly dreams. I don't see how you can be such a fool. What harm can dreams do you?"

"Cora, are you trying to quarrel?"

"No, I'm not trying to quarrel. I'm just telling you a thing or two. And you may as well know now as any time that I won't stay here, I won't. I care too much for Jack's life and my own."

"Do you really think you're in any special danger here?"

"No, no. Of course I don't think it. I'm just saying these things to have something to say."

"Then we'll have to go somewhere else. I've had a note from Keats Speed. I could get work in New York."

"New York? Do you think I'd go to New York? Baltimore's bad enough but more people die in New York than here. That's just like you to suggest New York as though I'd jump at that when it's ten times worse than Baltimore."

"All right, Cora. If you want to go back to Minneapolis, we'll go if I can get a job there."

"Why don't you write and find out then? They probably won't throw jobs at you through the air."

The man was bruised by the conversation but in the silence of the night he scourged himself more severely than Cora could have done it. He resented the tone in which she had reproached him but he approved the sentiment. He had been selfish and thoughtless. He had his work and friends at the office. She had only Jack to occupy her. He might tell himself that the child would have sufficed her, but the argument was of no effect; she did not find that enough. He had taken her from her friends and placed her among strangers; he had neglected her, losing himself in his senseless and impossible attempt to write. His writing had failed—it was certain to fail—he was not the stuff of which writers were moulded. He had failed as a husband, he had failed at his work, he had failed at

everything. He had tried to give his life to Cora and the child; he could not even succeed at that. Some black Fate stood across his path and turned his most serious efforts to ridicule and shame. No, he would not hide behind a Fate. The weakness was in himself, not in his stars.

Was he selfish? Was he indifferent? Was he deliberately unkind? Were his mental limitations so great that he could not recognize the truth and follow after it unerringly? Where could he find an answer to these questions? He was lost in a passion to excoriate himself. He was weak and little and blind and he must realize that these defects were forever a part of him, must be seen clearly and carried with him all the days of his life.

He could not even successfully maintain a feeling of love. He had loved Cora. That passion was dead. Weakling that he was, he had slain her love along with his own. He burned out too easily. That was it! he was a flash in the pan, a spark, and straightway cold again. A thin, shallow little man, pushing his way into the midst of realities that were too big for him to understand, too sincere for him to appreciate. What did he know of the realities? Nothing. Impossible for him to know since he had no clear idea of what constituted a reality. Cora knew. She was herself a reality. He? He was a sham, an image, a figure stuffed with straw, meaningless and without direction.

He had worked for Cora and Jack. They were the incentive back of the hours he had spent before the typewriter. It had not occurred to him while writing, and it did not occur to him in these moments of cold introspection, that he had written because of a deep inner impulse; that he was, in an untrained and stuttering manner, seeking self-expression, striving to fulfill the destiny of man and create. No. It was a task and he had attempted it for Jack. He had been wrong, he told himself now, wrong in the effort, wrong in the confidence. Doomed from the first instant to failure. Thank God, his eyes were open to the futility of that struggle. How long it had taken him! He had been wrong in believing that something, nameless, was to be found in Baltimore. He had been wrong from his early childhood in turning his eyes to the East. He should have gone out with Buck into the strong, fierce West. There in the presence of a colossal nature, he might have sloughed some of his weaknesses, might have had his eyes rudely opened to the naked facts. It was too late for that now. He had chosen the East and the East was denied him. He would go back, back to the icy winters of the Middle West and a flat unbroken mediocrity.

IX

JESSIE GAGE, on her way to New York, was coming to visit them. She and Cora had been friends since the old school days. She and Bruce had been more than friends. Intimates. Perhaps he had loved her; there had been at least a glamour, an allurement, a something, if less than love yet keener than friendship. . . .

Jessie was fair, little, with large eyes and a tilted nose that laughed impudently at the world. She flaunted her red "tam" and her red jacket daringly among a host of drably clothed girls. Bruce had known her for two years; had laughed at her and with her and never for an instant had he taken her seriously. Those were the days when Hilda, the glorious Norwegian girl, held sway over his heart. It is enough to say Hilda had passed, leaving no scar on the heart of either.

One morning, he went into the zoological laboratory—and found Jessie in tears. He was astonished. It was as though a comedy mask had suddenly started weeping. Embarrassed, he turned away. She looked at him through her tears.

"Don't go, Bruce. Please." She dabbed at her eyes and then came to him, a pitiful little girl needing comfort. She leaned her head on his shoulder and wept out her young grief. He touched her wavy, heavy hair; he laid his cheek against her hot, flushed forehead; he gave her, silently, a tender sympathy. Her sobs quieted, but she continued to cling to him. "Don't leave me. Let me rest here forever."

Bruce, young and inexperienced, knew not what to think. His egotism was not of the kind that would lead him to the conclusion that Jessie had fallen hopelessly in love with him. No, that idea did not occur to him. Doubtless he was flattered. An attractive girl, finding comfort in one's arms, might dazzle a wiser head than Bruce at that time had. Yes, he was flattered. More, he became suddenly aware of Jessie as a lovable girl.

An intimacy so begun ripened rapidly. They became inseparable. The school saw and smiled. They were refreshing, these two, hand in hand, laughing their way into the face of a hard world. One night he talked to her of love.

"You love me, Jessie?"

"Oh, Bruce, I don't know. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of me? That's nonsense."

"No, not of you. Of myself. I think, Bruce, I can never love again."

"Jessie! Again?"

"Yes . . . Bruce, you know the time—I cried? I had just found out then that the man I loved—Oh, Bruce, don't make me tell it. There can be no love for me."

"And you've known that all this time? You should have told me, Jessie."

"Bruce, dear, don't be sore. I thought I might—love you. I do—almost."

"That almost makes all the difference in the world."

"Yes, doesn't it? But I can't help it, I can't help it. Don't leave me, Bruce, now that you know. You're my only friend."

"But I don't want to be a friend."

"Love me, then, Bruce, but don't ask me to care more for you than I can."

Love me then. The phrase was awakening. Did he love her. It was extremely doubtful, else why the relief at the discovery that she did not love him? His vanity was touched but he experienced no depression.

By a singular coincidence, it was when affairs had reached that point that President Millspaugh interfered. The kindly, cultured gentleman voiced, to Bruce, a warning. He called the boy into his office and, in the gentlest manner possible, told him:

"You must not forget, Darton, that girls will find you attractive. I think if you remember that, you will not be tempted to take advantage of your power over them. I have watched with some concern the growing intimacy between you and Miss Gage. She is a charming girl and possessed of real ability. You will not want to do anything that can mar her future. Of course, I have no right, really, to give you any suggestions, but I am speaking as a friend. Please don't misunderstand me, and think over what I have said. That's all, thank you."

Bruce went out humbled, conscious that he had come from the presence of one whose big heart yearned over the pains and tragedies sown by youth. For a week he kept away from Jessie, who, ignorant of the part played by President Millspaugh, attributed his aloofness to her confession. At last she wrote him, requesting a meeting and they stood again on the bridge that spanned the lake which lay between the town and the bluffs. Side by side, their shoulders touching, they leaned on the railing and gazed down at the moon's broken reflection in the softly rippled water beneath them. The girl asked:

"Why have you kept away from me?"

Bruce, anticipating no change of sentiment on the part of his companion, answered: "You know, Jessie. It's no use trying to carry on a one-sided affair."

Softly her voice came to him, "It isn't one-sided, Bruce. I've found that out." He remained silent and in a moment she asked, a hurt note in her voice, "Aren't you glad?"

"Yes, Jessie. Of course. But surprised, after what you said last time."

"I know. And you do love me, Bruce? Oh, Bruce, I love you so terribly." He put his arms around her and she turned her face to his. They knew nothing of the temple of life, those two—they were barely on its threshold, and they were playing with a passion that the wisest men and women, grown strong in the ways of the world, are unable to control.

Bruce was never again quite happy in his association with Jessie. He was never sure of his love for her nor of her love for him. Yet they talked of marriage and planned against a future over which they daubed rosy colors. There was a tacit understanding, but there was no engagement. They admitted that years must precede marriage, and they faced this delay with equanimity.

The following year they were separated and their correspondence, at first fervid, dwindled, became matter of fact, unimportant. Jessie wrote the final word:

"Oh, Bruce, I'm sorry. I know now that I can't ever marry you. Forgive me. I didn't mean to cause you pain. It seemed so sweet to love you. What's become of that, Bruce? All I know is that it's gone. I don't understand it. It seems so strange to me that people should change. Why can't they always stay the same? I'm heartbroken, yet I'm glad I've found the courage to write this. Does that sound funny? I know it does, but it's true. Be

happy, Bruce. You must. And I shall be happy, too."

They had met afterwards as friends and with no recrimination. But Jessie had once or twice looked strangely at Bruce, a look that caused him an inner tremor, suggesting that, in some way, he had failed her. . . .

He and Cora went to the train to meet Jessie. She had changed little. Her eyes were as sparkling, her nose as impudently tilted as ever. She was voluble but betrayed no self-consciousness toward Bruce. They were extravagant and took her home in a cab. She was interested in everything and laughed merrily at Baltimore's absurdities. Bruce had given up his writing and he spent those hours now in taking Jessie and Cora to the interesting places that were accessible by trolley.

"I've seen more of Baltimore since you came, Jessie, then in all the months before," Cora said. "Bruce doesn't care for sightseeing—unless he has two women along."

"It's a good thing for you I'm here then," Jessie said.

"I was trying to write," Bruce explained. "And that took up all my time."

"You know how far he got with that," Cora said. "Remember when we used to think he was a great man?"

"That must have been a long time ago, Cora," Bruce said.

"He'd be all right now," Cora continued, "if he'd be satisfied to do the things he can do. He's a good newspaper man, but that's beneath him."

"It isn't beneath me, Cora. But I hate it."

"Of course. Because you can do it. He had a good place in Minneapolis, Jessie, but he had to throw that up."

"What ever made you come down here?" Jessie asked.

"Ask Bruce. His dreams did it."

"Cora! Please. Jessie isn't interested, are you?"

"Not if you don't want to tell me," the visitor said.

"There!" Cora exclaimed. "Be rude, Bruce. It's the best thing you do."

During the remainder of the excursion, Jessie was less animated than usual and she looked often and searchingly at Bruce's face. Lines were appearing there and in his black mass of hair white threads were visible. At home, she watched him as he held Jack in his arms and she saw his expression grow tender and a light that she could not understand glow in his eyes.

The next morning she met him in the hall upstairs while Cora was below preparing breakfast. She stopped in front of him, put her hands on his shoulders and raised her eyes to his.

"Bruce," she said, "Bruce, don't you love me any more?"

He took her hands from his shoulders and held them in his as he answered:

"No, Jessie. I'm sorry. Good God, I wish I did."

"Not the least little bit, Bruce? Oh, darling, darling, I have always loved you. It was a lie when I said I didn't—whenever I said it, it was a lie. I loved you, oh, long before you found me crying that time, but I was too young and silly and proud to admit it. Now I have no pride left, Bruce. I tell you everything, freely. You are married, but I don't care. Cora is

my friend and I don't care about that either. I love you. You are unhappy. It breaks my heart to see you unhappy. Oh, Bruce, I can't stand that. I'd crawl through the street on my knees to make you happy. Love me, Bruce, love me."

She freed her hands and clasped them around his neck. She clung to him, her cheeks wet with tears, her lips tremulous. Bruce looked down into her troubled face and felt pity and remorse and a sweeping tenderness, but no love leaping to life in his heart.

"I can't, Jessie, I can't," he said. "I think I've lost the power to love anything except Jack. I wish I loved you, I wish I could feel again as I have felt in the past. It's no use. That faculty is burned out of me. I shall never love again. Jessie dear, forgive me. I wouldn't for all the world hurt you if it could be avoided. It can't. It would hurt you more if I lied to you. I care for you too much to lie."

"Don't be sad, Bruce. If you don't, you don't. And I killed it. What a terrible fool I was. There. I'm not sorry I told you. I had to tell you. I won't bother you, Bruce. And I shall always love you . . . Just a minute. So. Kiss me."

Jessie cut short her visit and went on to New York. Bruce was troubled and glad to see her go. He felt it was the passing of a last chance at romance, and that now romance was dead in him. He had voiced a conviction when he told Jessie he had no longer any faculty for loving. He was nearing twenty-eight and the hey-day of life was ended for him. He felt that never again would he quicken to the fire of a pair of bright eyes, never again would he hang on the lips of some woman become inexpressibly dear. In some blind turning, he had missed the great passion. He had felt in his heart, at one time, a vast ability to love. Had he dissipated his resources, consumed the essence upon which so fierce a flame should feed? He did not know. It was gone and he was empty, with no means to recall it.

He, perhaps, at that time, had no great desire to recall it. He was not insensible to the joys of loving a beautiful woman, but he had centered his affection upon Jack and would have looked narrowly at any emotion that overlapped, or tended to mitigate, that passion. It was only after Jessie's departure that he passed in review his present relationship to his wife and child. Almost at once he came face to face with a situation that was shocking.

Cora's taunts and indifference were rasping nerves not yet fully recovered from the ordeal of his mother's death. Had she realized, had it been possible for her to realize, the complete devastation worked in him by that tragedy, her maternal instinct would have prompted her to soothe his lacerations and he would have found solace and freedom from dreams and heartaches within the shelter of her arms. It was Cora's fate that she could not accept this man's torments as real, that she saw his sufferings as affectations, his despondancy as a pose. To Cora an emotion, to be genuine, must be consistent and enduring—the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. No fault attached to her for this attitude—it was her nature. She would have resented, and justly, any suggestion that she was lacking in sympathy or understanding. Within the circle of her limitations she left nothing to be desired; beyond that point no one could ask her to go.

How much of this Bruce understood, it is impossible to say. What he did understand was the fact that there was no harmony between them, that long since their paths had diverged and that they were each day moving steadily farther and farther apart. He did not find that Cora was conscious of this growing separation. Nor would he have experienced any serious regrets over this divergence had it not been for Jack. To lose Cora was to lose him; to lose him was to tear out of his life the one thing that made life bearable. The cold

sweat of terror gathered on his brow at the thought. He was unable, literally unable to face that calamity.

Thus scourged, he endeavored to win nearer to his wife. It was perplexing to Cora, and slightly intoxicating, this belated courtship. She had no glimmer of its significance and while she looked upon it merely as another of Bruce's fads, she accepted it as a tribute to her charm and, making use of the power he placed in her hands, she bent him to her will. He yielded. It was natural that his effacement should be complete. He was driven by an heroic impulse and he held nothing back. His self-negation was supreme. He had ceased to live or move as an entity apart from his son. He worked, but his work was lighted by his love; he dreamed dreams but the central and dominating figure in each of them was his son.

Yet in this excess of devotion he held his peace. To no one at the office did he mention his son and never again, after those first fine moments in Minneapolis, did he take Cora into his confidence. His passion was secret: its very intensity choked utterance. It was not only that his lips were sealed; he put a curb upon his conduct; he did not reveal himself by deed or look, and Cora thought, with a mocking smile, of the day when Bruce had discovered his love for his son. "It didn't last long," she could think, so checking against her husband one more mark as a fickle and insincere man.

X

WHEN the telegram came from the St. Paul *Dispatch*, Cora was elated. She gave Bruce no opportunity to consider. "Answer it, 'Coming at once,' " she urged him. "Why hesitate? We ought to thank Heaven for this chance. You see that, don't you?"

The East, the East! What was that urge of the East and why had it got into his blood? Whence came it? From what remote ancestor, born in the glow of the rising sun, had he this impulse? It was not enterprise, it was not ambition, it was not a strong desire to sit at the feet of Time. It was only a craving, like those inexplicable appetites that afflict the sick. He knew its secret no more than any one else, but he knew it had been part of his earliest thought. Here he was on the doorstep of that East. Only the Atlantic rolled between him and the distant coveted places. He must turn his back upon the rising sun and watch his shadow lengthen to the West.

This sacrifice, this denial of nature, was for Jack. How could he tell what point of the compass would attract this child, just beginning to prattle? Perhaps like his mother he would find nothing but homesickness away from the Middle West. That strange call that brought to Bruce the hot wind of the desert and the fetid breath of the jungle, might sound no response in the heart of his son and all this striving into the far places of the earth would then be wasted.

As directed, he sent the wire and the next evening they turned their backs upon the ocean and set their faces to the inland seas and the state of a thousand lakes.

Cora had won, but it was, in the slow parade of Time, the most costly victory of all her life. The night was coming, and was near at hand, when she would wet her lonely pillow with tears and cry out in pain for one who could no longer resist the deep impulses of his soul and who was seeking, on the shores of the distant ocean, the mystic Eastern spice that should reveal to him the secret of life.

XI

BRUCE was assigned to the copy desk on the *Dispatch* and went to work for twenty-five dollars a week. They found inexpensive rooms in Hamline and almost immediately life settled into a routine. Herbert Galt, City Editor and head of the desk, was a Virginian, and in his courtesy and kindness typified the best of that aristocratic state. Perhaps he sensed in Bruce a kindred spirit; at any rate, he extended him every consideration and did what he could to make the work congenial.

A man was needed at the office very early in the morning to help the editor of the sports page prepare his copy. Galt selected Bruce for this duty and gave him an adequate increase in salary. Bruce had returned to St. Paul against his will and, by the law of luck, he became the recipient of favors. A few months after joining the staff of the *Dispatch*, the place of Political Editor became vacant, and Galt offered the position to Bruce.

It was not surprising that he hesitated. Most of his newspaper work had been "inside" and it was hard for him to believe that he would be valuable "on the street." He took his problem to his old managing editor in Minneapolis. The advice he received was to refuse the place. "You're no mixer," Hamblin said. "Stick inside. That's where you belong."

It was this advice, probably, that decided him: He accepted the job.

Bruce was a stranger in St. Paul. Though he had lived for several years in Minneapolis, he knew practically no one in the capital city. He barely knew the names of the most famous state officers and had only one or two acquaintances among the other political editors. In this condition of ignorance, he faced a state convention and a turmoil in politics.

He set himself to the task of solving his problems—and he solved them. He made friends in the capitol, he was "wised up" by other kindly disposed newspaper men. He discovered in himself, and developed, a faculty for making friends, for winning confidence. The clerk of the Supreme Court, who knew all there was to know about state politics, early learned that Bruce could be trusted—trusted not to disclose secrets and trusted to put a reasonable interpretation on news. He became, for Bruce, an invaluable ally.

When the state convention met, Bruce, with the assistance of a Duluth reporter, succeeded in scooping the other Twin-city papers. His reputation was made by that scoop. Henceforth he was not an outsider, but one familiar with the inner shrine and no doors were barred to him.

This position and this success were of surprising significance in Bruce's life. Primarily, they stopped the introspection that had dogged him like a secret vice. His eyes were turned outward. He saw men actively engaged in the serious affairs of life. He was aware of their chicanery and of their generosity; he was privy to their weaknesses and their strength. They were no longer figures passing idly on the street: they were realities and he probed their passions, he bared their emotions, he scrutinized their sentiments. In a word, he was pitched headlong into life.

As part of this headlong pitching, he learned to drink. The inhibition created by the

vow to his mother was violated. He went pell mell into the life of which the politicians were the center. In this excess of living, he was aided by the fact that Cora had gone north to visit her parents. In taking to drink, he was cautious, mistrusting his ability to withstand its effects. In this his judgment was well founded. A little liquor went a long way. But a little was delightful and on the fringe of intoxication he was happy, his eyes looking out upon a glad old world in which it was good to live.

There were parties at which the guests drank to excess and he got his first hint of a bohemian existence. He saw women smoke and drink and he learned that modesty is not essential to virtue. He was shocked but he was delighted. He decided that he had always hated the conventions. Restraints went glimmering. In this atmosphere one could be oneself—provided only one's impulses were decent.

Among these people, actresses and actors, politicians and journalists, he heard much, for the first time, of self-expression, of the right to live, of the urge that makes men and women ready to sacrifice everything to be themselves. In the light of this talk, *Peer Gynt* took on new significance. He reread the book. It troubled him. He could not see that it meshed with the tide of thought around him. He looked upon his companions and decided they were fit for the button moulder. He considered himself: there were worse fates than going into that old fellow's ladle.

He was learning thus, late in life, the things that the average American boy knows at sixteen. He had read widely and deeply but he was profoundly ignorant. He had put his hand into the cold, dead hand of the past and advanced backwards. Now he was thrown into the current of men, was caught in the flux of fierce activities, was whirled forward, the shouts of living men in his ears. He was intoxicated with excitement. He drank and was silly. Under the influence of liquor he was verbose, unflatteringly candid, a bitterness edging his tongue. Whence this sting? Compounded of regret dragged out of his own consciousness of missed opportunities. The shafts that he threw at his companions were aimed at his own heart.

He met men, men, men. The circle of his acquaintance widened; it embraced the state, it touched national figures. In his calm moments he measured himself with the leaders whom the people delighted to honor. He did not find that they surpassed him. He was their equal in judgment and appeal; he exceeded them in reading and culture. Ambition stirred in him. He began to make speeches and discovered some inherited faculty in that line. He told his stories to the delight of his listeners and held them with his obvious sincerity.

It was a surprising evolution, yet it was natural: his forebears were speaking through him. He came of a family trained for a century and a half on the platform of a speech-making state. To have failed in that line would have been to brand himself illegitimate.

As was said, he was a man of whom people talked. His words were repeated and his deeds became legendary. Without effort he had stepped from obscurity into prominence. The Duluth Bar Association gave him a dinner in recognition of the articles he had written on the life and work of Judge Debell. At that dinner he was toasted and eulogized. Other organizations, half political, half commercial, followed this example. He was merely a newspaper man, but the astute ones sensed in him a future and got early into line.

The summer sped away. There were orgies of drinking, of poker, of late hours, a trembling hand and an aching head in the morning. But he had grown wise in the ways of the drunkard and had learned that seltzer with a shot of absinthe was a powerful "pick-me-

up." But this life brought with it narrow escapes, hazards at which he laughed, grown indifferent to physical consequences.

There was a conference of four of the leading politicians of the state. Afterwards Bruce joined them and there was the inevitable rounds of drinks. Guy Felton and Haden Wick and Charlie Rap and Judge Standard composed the conferees. These four men held the northern two-thirds of Minnesota in their pockets, politically. Bruce joined them at the bar where they were having before-dinner drinks. Haden was a Swede and the shrewdest, clearest-headed politician of the clique. He was bow-legged and never so bowed as when enraged at some weak-minded move on the part of a lieutenant. He was short and broad with long powerful arms and a small head, suggesting little the keen intellect he possessed. It was he, a heavy two fisted drinker, who warned Bruce away from after-dinner whiskey.

They were dining at Carlin's and after they had finished, Bruce ordered a whiskey straight. Haden, always polite, had interfered tactfully.

"Wouldn't you rather join me in a Benedictine?"

"What's that? Never drank it."

"A cordial. Try it. I think you'll like it better than whiskey."

"Anything you say, Haden."

As they sipped the drinks, Bruce imitating Haden's deliberate manner, the latter asked:

"Better than whiskey, isn't it?"

"Certainly as good. I loathe the taste of whiskey."

"Yes . . . Someone told me you only recently began drinking."

"Right. Since I went on this job."

"Then you won't mind my saying one or two things?"

"Shoot, Haden. I haven't reached the point where I think I know all there is to know about booze."

"Americans seldom learn to drink. They just drink, blindly. It's really an art, slowly acquired. Those who know, don't drink whiskey after eating a full meal—not for two or three hours. They sip a cordial—more than one if they like, but whiskey and cocktails, no. You don't mind my saying this?"

"Glad to know it. I've no desire to be a damned fool about this drinking. I want the kick, not the disease . . ."

Guy Felton was handsome and quiet and humorous. He was familiar with the ways of the world and unobtrusively gained his ends. Charlie Rapp, youngest of the three, had found a place for himself as a lawyer up on the Iron Range. He had risen quickly, for he had ability and powerful friends. He was in the legislature and no measure affecting the steel industry could hope to pass without his indorsement. Judge Standard was slow and slightly ponderous, with large, soft brown eyes that belied the grim trait in his mind. He could be affable to the point of urbanity, but he was relentless, he never yielded, he fought with his back to a wall and looked kindly upon the man whose throat he was about to cut.

For some reason, in those old perished days of much drinking, a certain amount of liquor led inevitably to a chop suey house. This mystery has never been explained. Now it is gone and not even Volsted can furnish a solution. The five men passed from the bar to a

Chinese restaurant. What started the trouble? Who knows? When the fumes of liquor are on the breath, trouble is always at one's elbow. Perhaps the Chinese boy did not understand Guy's order or inclined to trifle with these roisterers who meant nothing to him.

There was an altercation and the mild Guy raised his voice. An instant later he raised himself and the waiter fled, with Guy in pursuit. As is characteristic of a certain stage of drunkenness, the other four men were uninterested and remained seated. It was mildly amusing—the flying Chinese boy and the raging Guy. They laughed, but their laughter was cut short by a roar from the kitchen. Led by Bruce and Haden the four rushed to their companion's assistance.

Guy was holding the waiter by his cue and forcing his head down upon the chopping block. In one hand he flourished a cleaver and the air was full of his murderous threats. The boy screamed for help and help came.

Out of nooks and crannies, from behind chests, down from the ceiling and up from the floor, apparently materializing miraculously, came Chinamen. They came armed with knives and meat axes and cruel two-pronged forks. Their black eyes glowed and they filled the kitchen with a mad babble of chatter.

Guy released his victim and backed towards the door. Haden caught up an iron mop and swung it viciously before him. Bruce, stepping in dextrously, remembering something of his early training, feinted with his left and knocked a Chinaman down with his right. The uproar increased. A knife was thrown which, missing Haden by an inch, stuck in the doorjamb and hung quivering, sinister.

Judge Standard thrust his way into the room. He passed Haden and Bruce and stood alone before the outraged Chinese. He talked to them, his rich, cultivated voice drowning out their cries; talked until they were reduced to silence and only stood fondling their weapons and planning dark murder. They understood, probably, only one word in twenty of the Judge's harangue, but his voice was kindly and authoritative. It gradually restored their confidence in the white devils, persuaded them that they were not all to be instantly decapitated. They drooped before their master; they hid their knives, or laid them down; they melted away, disappeared into obscure hiding places, vanished.

The men returned to the dining-room and sat down. They had not given up the idea of having chop suey.

"That might have been a nasty mess, but for you, Judge," Haden said.

"A mere nothing," the Judge replied. "If I could as easily talk over the voters of Minnesota——"

"Why don't you do your killing in the quiet of your own home, Guy?" Charlie asked.

"Kill, nothing." Guy explained. "All I meant to do was to cut off his fool queue."

"Is that all?" Haden asked. "You'd have been safer to have gone farther and taken the head with the queue."

"Never could see any sense in the silly pigtail anyway," Guy grumbled.

"Ah, my boy," said Judge Standard, "you should read your history. You'd get an idea then of the long tragedy back of that fool pigtail. You shouldn't be so narrow, Guy, as to suppose that the Chinaman's queue has no significance."

“Jerked to heaven by it, or something, ain’t it?” Guy asked, but the Judge only looked pityingly at him and was silent.

All that summer and fall, Wick seemed ever at Bruce’s elbow. At any rate, in after years the only episodes he could remember were those with which Haden was identified. It was he, at least, who brought to Bruce most of his new experiences.

One hot night, late in August, he and Haden and Jim Brownson and Charlie Rapp and Joe Woolens, with whom Bruce roomed at the time, and Judge Standard and Walter Jones were in Haden’s room at the St. Paul hotel. Mint juleps were suggested, probably by the judge who had drunk them in “The Cave” at New Orleans. The drinks were ordered and hour after hour the waiter was kept busy hurrying mint juleps to Wick’s room. This continued until the supply was exhausted and that state of intoxication was reached where more drinks become a necessity.

It was so late that the bars were all closed but Haden was not without resources. “I know a place,” he said. “Come with me, you little band of careful drunkards, and I’ll feed you more booze.”

“Don’t call me what I ain’t,” said Jim, “but I want to be and I’ll go with you.”

Haden took them to a side street, entered the hallway of a brick building, led them up two pairs of stairs, and rang a bell.

“What kind of a dump is this, Haden?” Bruce asked.

Haden grinned drunkenly but did not answer. A colored girl opened the door and conducted them into a living-room. A fat woman, with yellow hair and keenly cut features, received them.

“Is this Miss Hemstead?” Haden asked.

“Yes. What can I do for you?”

“We want to get a little drink, me and my friends. Just one little drink, if you please, Miss Hemstead.”

“Certainly. And you won’t want anything else?”

“I speak only for myself,” said Haden. “All I require is a little drink. It’s been a hot dry night, Miss Hemstead.”

“Then I’m not to send for the ladies?”

“Sure,” said Jim.

“Certainly,” said Charlie. Judge Standard and Bruce were silent.

The drinks were served. Haden, glass in hand, would permit no one to drink until he had elaborately introduced each of his friends to Miss Hemstead.

“And now, Miss Hemstead, these gentlemen would esteem it a privilege if you would drink with them. Madame, will you take my glass?”

His courtesy was somewhat marred by the fact that he spilled most of the liquor into the woman’s lap.

“I thought the plan was to drink with the lady, not christen her,” said Jim. They laughed long at this rare witticism.

They were seasoned men, accustomed to alcohol and, though they drank rapidly and often, it was only slowly that they became maudlin. Two girls appeared. It seemed to

Bruce that they came into the picture suddenly, as though taking form out of the invisible atmosphere. One had red hair and was slender; the other was dark and tended to heaviness. They were introduced as Betty Brown and Elsie Smith. At first they chatted to the company, but their instinct was unerring and in a few minutes they were giving their attention exclusively to Jim and Charlie.

Jim started singing an obscene song, but Haden stopped him, and Bruce felt himself go cold with rage at the attempted indecency, though neither the girls nor Miss Hemstead appeared to mind.

Joe was past the power of speech. His lips moved but no sound came from them. His eye was vacant and a meaningless smile made his expression idiotic. The judge put his arms upon the table, bowed his great head upon them and slept. Haden continued to talk, grimly determined not to yield to the whiskey he had drunk. In Bruce there grew a desire to ask Miss Hemstead a question. It seemed important, essential to be asked. He interrupted Wick.

"Pardon me, Haden. Miss Hemstead, may I ask you a question?"

He had not before addressed her. She looked at him now. His face was dead white, but his eyes were full of light and eager.

"Certainly," she said.

"Thank you. Will you tell me—do you mind?—how many sunsets went to the gilding of your hair that inimitable gold?"

The woman laughed. "That's a hard one."

Haden answered for her. "I'll tell you, if you'll tell me how many centuries went to painting the speedwell blue?"

"Your quotation is not accurate," Bruce told him severely. "Neither, if you don't mind my saying so, is it apropos. Miss Hemstead has kindly permitted me to consider the rare gold of her hair. I have propounded a question. Think, Haden, of all the suns that are lost in that fine mesh of living light. Consider the aeons——"

"I'd rather consider a drink. You'll join us, Miss Hemstead. Don't mind my friend, here. He's almost human when he's sober. The night, my boy, was not planned for philoso—philoso—well, it wasn't, but for the poetry of many drinks. Am I right?"

Joe became articulate. "Tha' reminth me o' shtory o' frien'."

"Keep it," said Haden. "Don't spoil a good story with a bad delivery."

Bruce was lost in speculation, following Miss Hemstead's hair back into the mad beginning of things. The room was hot. Haden was talking of Sweden and Norway. Miss Hemstead, it seemed, was a Scandinavian. Betty and Elsie came back into the room. Bruce had not realized that they had been absent. Charlie came in. Haden asked for Jim and Charlie said he was asleep.

A haze came down upon Bruce obscuring the faces of his friends. It lifted, and Haden at his elbow was a giant. The subdued murmur of the Judge's breathing roared in his ears. A sudden silent frenzy gripped him. He rose and went out, descended the stairs and stepped into the street.

A pale, haggard dawn confronted him.

It was rude, naked, silent. He was alone in an expanse of endless streets. He was a

waif, a castaway, the shattered remnant of a wreck. He was cold and shivered in the raw morning; he burned and opened his collar to the cool breeze. The light increased. Day was stepping majestically forward. He moved toward home, but he staggered. He was possessed of a great self-loathing. He had spent the night in an assignation house, he had drunk away the hours with prostitutes. But he had lived. He threw back his head and went proudly, defiantly. He had thumbed many an old book—that was necessary. Now he was turning the pages of a brand new book, a mean soiled book, still in the making. That, too, was necessary.

He reached his room. The stench of his debauch was in his nostrils. He called down curses on his weak and meaningless acts. As he undressed he remembered Jack and he fell on his bed shaken with drunken sobs.

XII

GALT was not ignorant of the line Bruce was following. He watched his course with regret and hoped, in the face of disappointment, that the young man would mend his ways. No reformation occurred and he was forced, at last, to act. He told Bruce plainly:

"You're drinking too much. It's hurting your work. The big boss has heard of it and he's on my neck. Now, cut it, cut it off with a knife and forget it. The time of the drinking newspaper man has gone by. If you want to take an occasional drink, that's your business. If you insist upon drinking to excess, that's our business. You've got this job in hand and you can handle it better than any one I know. I'll tell you something that I'm not supposed to tell you yet for a while, but may be it will help you solve your present problem. You're booked for Washington. That's a straight tip. You wouldn't like to be our Washington correspondent, I suppose? Cut out the booze and you'll be wandering around the White House in six months. Go ahead now; don't make any promises but keep your eye on your step."

Washington! The East once more! He was excited, and his excitement rose above his chagrin at Galt's reprimand.

"After the legislature adjourns, do you think?" he asked Galt.

"That's the time. We need you here through this session."

"You're on. The little Mohave desert for mine."

But he was not to see Washington as a representative of the St. Paul *Dispatch*. No, life had other hidden roads for him to travel and the way was beset with sharp outcroppings, unexpected, maddening.

It was said before that the effect of the political editorship was threefold upon Bruce. The third of these lay in the opportunities presented to him. Long before the legislature met, more than one clique of country business men tried to induce him to take charge of their local paper. None of these propositions were sufficiently remunerative to tempt him. Before the legislature adjourned, however, a new and attractive proposal came to him. A man was wanted at Chisholm, on the *Iron Range*, and the paper and plant would be all but given to Bruce if he would accept them.

It is hard to say at just what moment a political ambition was born in Bruce. Perhaps it was when he learned that he could move an audience; it may have been when he gauged himself the equal of the best office holders in the state. It was there and it came consciously to the front with the Chisholm offer. No other place in the state provided equal opportunities for a clear-headed young man. He took the proposition to Cora and they talked it over.

They were again living in the Hamline district. Cora had been away many months and her summer had not been a happy one. Bruce had demonstrated a capacity for living apart from her that was alarming. He had been a bad correspondent and in exasperation she had written him that she would return only when he sent for her. The summons was long in

coming. Only a day or two before Galt spoke to him Bruce was drinking at the St. Paul hotel. He had been drinking every evening for a long time and had grown weary of intoxication. At the moment another episode was fresh in his mind. . . .

The editorial association was meeting on the shores of Cass Lake and thither Bruce went. Where the editors were, there the politicians were also. That was the way he met Meriam. Meriam was Judge Standard's daughter and married to a Doctor Blandish. She was like her father in looks and her brown eyes and bronze hair caught and held Bruce's fancy.

The Judge was leaving on a late boat. The night was pitch black and Bruce went to the dock with Meriam and her father. As they came back, he put his arm around her and leaned close to her face.

"Don't, Bruce," she said. "We have no right. You mustn't kiss me."

He desisted at once and they went on into the house together. There were many people present and they found seats on opposite sides of the room. Later he found a place near her.

"What were you thinking, Meriam, when you were looking at me a while ago?"

"You'd never guess and I shouldn't tell you. But I will. I was wishing I'd let you—you know."

"Meriam! You darling. Come out with me now."

"Go ahead. I'll follow."

On the dark porch they stood with their arms around each other and he took his fill of kisses.

"I don't feel bad, doing this, Bruce. I can't. I don't love my husband—he knows I don't love him. And I do love you, Bruce. From the very first instant I loved you. Oh, before that. Father had talked of you. He knew I'd like you. I said, 'I don't think I'll care much for your young friend. He sounds hideously conceited.' And Father said, 'I don't worry about that. All I ask, daughter, is that you don't like him too well.' There. And now I do. Oh, Bruce, what ever will become of us?"

"I don't know, Meriam. It's not an easy problem. Your father shouldn't have left you here."

"He shouldn't, should he? I told him, Bruce. Well, I told him I liked you awfully. He said, 'I can trust you, and I can trust Darton. If you want to stay, I've no objection.' "

Bruce let his arms fall at his side. "After that, Meriam——"

"Yes, after that. I wouldn't let you kiss me—and then I couldn't help it. Father'll understand . . . Oh, if it weren't for Paul! . . . Yes, and I forgot—your wife, too. Oh, Bruce, we can never untangle this mess. We'll just have to go on and on and on. I go mad when I think of it. I've been married three years, and I hate it, Bruce, I hate it. But I didn't mind, not so much. I had Father and I didn't want anyone else and I endured Paul. But now it's all so different, so hideous. You did that. You just let me see you and I looked through your eyes—Does it sound silly to say it?—into paradise and then everything went black for me. . . ."

Judge Standard came to the bar. Bruce had not seen him for some weeks. The two men greeted each other warmly and drank. Bruce was at that stage of intoxication where

feeling dictates speech. He could not look at Judge Standard without seeing Meriam. He drew the older man into a quiet corner.

"Judge, you know about me and Meriam. We can't help the way we feel but we've played fair and square with everyone."

"Yes," said Standard, "I know. And I wish, my boy, things were different."

"But they aren't different and so what are we to do?"

"Do? The honorable thing. Meriam, I know, will do that. She has her husband and no legal ground for leaving him. You have a wife and son—responsibilities. Isn't your way clear to you?"

"Yes, by God . . . Let's have a drink, Judge."

Afterwards he went to the telegraph desk and sent Cora a wire:

"You better come back home, if you can. I want you and Jack. I've been out in the rain and found it wet. No satisfaction out in the rain alone. Wire me, please, if you can persuade yourself to return."

He had had many drinks—that is to say, he was susceptible. Would he have acted so readily upon the Judge's suggestion had he been sober? Perhaps not. He was fast growing into independence. Yet it is a fact that he had never seriously considered the separation as permanent. That was a contingency that he was not prepared to face. He couldn't face it. In his heart his child still reigned.

He knew that when he met his wife and son at the station. He thrilled at the sight of the boy. The eager cry of "Daddy" was, in his ears, the world's sweetest music. He gathered his son in his arms and a deep peace suffused him.

Cora watched the reunion in tremulous uncertainty. The ground had slipped from beneath her feet. Some change had come to Bruce—she knew not what. In the face of his new attitude her assurance fled. She found herself dependent, not financially, but morally, spiritually, and the discovery was confusing.

This woman had little faculty for introspection. Hence she could not lay her finger on the secret motives that prompted the change. Yet the page was clear to read. Bruce had sprung into prominence. She had heard him talked of, had seen his name in the papers. He was praised as a clever writer, a persuasive speaker. When strangers mentioned him, she was prompted to tell them, "That is my husband." Pride in her man was born in her.

Before she had joined him in Baltimore, he had written regularly, fully. His letters had become to her a satiety. Alone in St. Paul he wrote seldom and sketchily, confining himself to inquiries about, and messages to, his son. He had become remote, illusive. Her ultimatum had called forth no reproaches, elicited no appeals. As the days went by she knew that she had expected him to urge her to return, to be desperate at her refusal. He exhibited no anxiety. His brief notes continued to arrive at irregular intervals, generally with a money-order enclosure.

At first she was fiercely determined never to return to him. She tried to plan a future without him. In time she modified this resolution: she would return after he had pleaded seriously and long. She clung to that. When his strange wire arrived, the last vestige of her pride fled. She started at once for St. Paul.

Had she, for a second time, fallen in love with her husband? Probably not; but she was

on dangerous ground—she was proud of him. The sneers at his incompetence and emotional gyrations were fled. She accepted him. She told herself that at last she understood her husband. She believed that and looked for happiness to follow this understanding. It did not occur to her that Bruce had long since ceased to love her. Vanity threw its shadow over that spot. He had loved her. In her woman's logic it followed that he must still love her.

They returned to Hamline. She was made physically comfortable but there was a black spot in the midst of her sunshine: she had Bruce and she did not have him. She wanted him again in her control and he passed like quicksilver through her fingers. He paid adoration to her son, but he gave to her only the shell of himself. It was a dilemma that quickened into a nightmare. A hunger grew in her heart, expanded, filled her. She was caught up by a self-induced ecstacy: she told herself she was in love with her husband.

He laid before her the terms of the Chisholm proposition.

"You see, Cora, it means leaving the city, going into a rigorous climate. We'll be uncomfortable, physically. You'll be a long way from your people—much farther than at present. You'll have no friends, though you may make new ones there. I shall be away most of the time, busy all the time. It'll be no child's play. What do you say?"

"Do you want to go?"

"Left entirely to myself, yes."

"Then we'll go."

"No regrets?"

"No, Bruce. It looks like too good a thing to refuse."

"All right. Then we'll give it a try. You know, it means I shall go in for politics."

"I suppose so. But that needn't make any difference."

"Difference? What do you mean?"

"Nothing. But it won't. I won't let it."

Had Bruce known, had it been possible for this woman, who had no skill at portraying her real thoughts, to tell him, he might have hesitated at the Chisholm venture. Had he known that she believed she had brought her love back to him—but he did not know. All he knew was that she had gone out of his heart; that in the moments when he had wanted sympathy she had been dumb, when he had wanted understanding she had been blind. He had brought her a fine, clear passion and she had dissipated it; he had been faithful and she had scoffed; he had thought aloud in her presence and she had called him a fool. He did not remember these things, they were no longer in his mind, but he felt them. The scars persisted, though the wounds had healed.

XIII

IN the spring of 1911 Chisholm was rapidly growing into a city. Iron was everywhere. Fortunes were made over night. Great train loads of the red ore from the Iron Range were moving constantly towards Duluth and Superior. Enormous steam-driven shovels tore the ore from its age-old resting place and hurled it into the cars to be hurried East to the mills that were unceasingly fed and were never glutted.

Powerful men, Finns mostly, stained red by the stuff in which they worked, climbed over the shovels or disappeared from sight in the yawning excavations. Everywhere men fought for the fortunes that lay at their feet. It was a mad scramble, a nightmare of effort.

Into the midst of this maelstrom Bruce descended. He took over the paper and at once began his work as an editor. There was a job plant in connection and it was out of that end of the business that most of the money was to come. In a few weeks, it seemed afterwards as though it had happened instantly, he knew all the important business men in town. He called them by their first names and they all knew him as Bruce.

The paper thrived. He had skill at getting business. He cajoled or bullied his advertisers into using space; he was voracious in his demands for job work. He appealed to his friends in Duluth and they sent him big orders. His presses were never idle. He looked ahead towards an enlarged business and increased the plant. He put in another job press, he secured a "pony" linotype machine. Almost at once he was able to meet his notes. In a year the paper was his.

All of this had not been accomplished without work. He had lived at the office, the business had been his board and his bed. He thought it and dreamed it. Yet he found time to keep the political fires going. He made many speeches—Virginia, Hinckley, Duluth, all heard him and applauded. His editorials were copied in the metropolitan papers. He was no longer merely a reporter: he was a dominant factor in the dominant North.

What was the incentive that made him thus scourge himself? His political ambition cannot be ignored; but he was driven by a deeper necessity than that: he was working for Jack. He had no interest in money—the time came when he had no interest in place—but he was building a road for his son. He was laying a foundation upon which the boy might rear a classic future. Every revolution of the press was for him an expression of his love; every edition of the paper was a monument to that affection.

Cora had been, temporarily, braced by the excitement of the town. It was new and strange and thrilling. That passed; emptiness huddled in its place. She was alone, bitterly alone. Jack was in thrall to his father and Bruce thought only of his son. She was outside the enchanted circle and the days were heavy on her hands. She did not admit to herself that she had lost Bruce but she knew she no longer occupied a large place in his thoughts. She sought to remedy this evil and marred the design in touching it.

"Want to ride over to Virginia in the morning?" Bruce asked. "I have to go over. We'll get a car——"

"No, I don't. You never ask me to go anywhere except on business."

“I never go anywhere except on business. I’m the world’s keenest business man. Won’t you come?”

“No. I’d rather not.”

When he returned from the trip, she upbraided him. “You might have taken me with you.”

“But I asked you to go.”

“Yes. On business! And you didn’t urge me to go. It wasn’t hard to see you’d rather I didn’t go.”

“Nonsense, Cora. I wanted you along.”

“You never want me with you. You’re only happy away from me. You care a lot more for your boon companions at the office than you do for me.”

He had a big order from Duluth and hurried delivery was imperative. He told the foreman of the job room:

“Put that job on the press an I’ll kick out a few thousand tonight. You can run off the rest in the morning and we’ll get the stuff away on the afternoon train.”

At dinner, Cora said, “You aren’t going to the office tonight, Bruce, are you.”

“Sorry, yes. I’m going to run the job press and help out on a job from Duluth.”

“It’s not often I ask you to stay home.”

“You’ve picked an unfortunate evening, Cora. If I don’t work tonight, the boys can’t finish the run in time to catch the afternoon train. The work’s due in Duluth the next morning.”

“It’s always something important. I never knew a man who had so little time for his family.”

“This is only Wednesday. I was home Sunday and Monday evenings.”

“Yes, and a crowd here each night.”

“It wasn’t my fault if the boys came in.”

“It’s never your fault. I can stay here day in and day out, and you never give me a thought. You drag me up here into this out-of-the-way corner of the world where I’m almost as far from home as I was in Baltimore, and then you calmly walk off night after night and leave me to amuse myself.”

“I suppose you are homesick. Would you like to go home, Cora? You can if you wish.”

“Yes. Certainly. You’d be glad to be rid of me. I’m in your way. You’re getting to be a great man and I’m in your way. That’s it. No, thank you. I’ll stay here.”

“I meant it kindly, Cora.”

“Yes, you did not.”

“What can I do? I’ll stay if you like.”

“No, I won’t have you stay. No, no, no. Go to the office. Keep your appointment.”

“I haven’t any appointment, Cora. You know that.”

“Never mind. Go, anyway.”

He left her and as he ran the job press that night, he thought of many things.

For a long time he had been growing cold towards politics. A closer association with office holders had cured him. They were a small lot. They did, or were forced to do, mean and petty things. They were not all honest, not in the full and right meaning of the word. At length he questioned if any of them was honest, if it was possible to succeed in public life and retain one's self-respect. He considered the things that he knew had been done and he guessed at more serious offences. This reaction in a nature so sensitive and so imbued with ideals was bound to come. He could only have been interested in the game by deliberately blinding himself. When he paused to take stock, the hoodwink fell away. The prospect thus revealed was shocking.

Very likely he exaggerated the evils. No matter. They existed for him and their aspect was revolting.

With the death of this ambition, he faced fatuity and became once more introspective. Each of these evils he might have avoided had he remained in a larger place, where larger men with a wider grasp would have influenced him. Denied this, he was thrown back to contemplate the chaos in his soul. He found things stale, flat and unprofitable. His life, a dreary waste, was slipping away from him. He was thirty years old and had turned many corners but remained near his starting point.

He thought of Cora and shivered. He thought of Jack and glowed. For the first time this black juxtaposition caught him squarely between the eyes. His life with Cora was impossible. His life without his son was impossible. Here was an impassé. He threw off the switch, the press ceased to revolve. He paused to consider. It struck him as astonishing that he had never before brought those two ideas into their proper intimate relationship. He could never again consider one without considering the other.

It occurred to him that neither he nor Cora could be happy as long as they remained together. If they had ever had anything to give each other, it was now gone. If they had needed only to unsnarl the tangled threads to attain contentment, they might have set about that business and accomplished it. But there were no connecting threads between them. So far as Bruce could see they were separated by a universe. It was evident that Jack did not unite them—he merely emphasized the distance between them.

He turned his attention to the boy. He could feel the small hand in his, the fingers closing tightly. "I'll hold on, Daddy. I can't fall while I hold tight, can I?" "Daddy, hold me close. I want to give you a great hug. I love you, Daddy." "How much do you love me, Jack?" "More than I can hold in my arms, lots more. I love you all the grass in the yard, and all the trees and all the flowers and all the big holes that the iron comes out of. And I love you all the stars." "That's a great deal, Jack." "Yes. How much do you love me, Daddy?"

The height and the depth and the breadth of things, the sea and the fullness thereof. To emptiness. To a supreme surrender of mind and soul. To an eternity before and an eternity after. Higher than any God can dream. To the limit that exceeds limit. To the impudence of a Creator. To the awful and majestic impossible.

The man sought words and phrases to picture to himself this feeling. They would not formulate themselves, extravagance running pale. And this was Cora's son. It was a travesty, it was a mocking blunder, it was hideous. He was swept away by his own grief, numbed by the fury of these clashing ideas.

He did not hate Cora. If he could but hate her—impossible. There was no decision of character that could arouse so strong a feeling. There was a constant irritation, the result of a slow accumulation of small disagreements. An irritation that had grown chronic, that had passed the acute stage and now gnawed unceasingly day and night.

A scientist would have known at once that he and Cora were not living normal lives. The effects were written large on each of them. Cora was irritable to the point of hysteria and Bruce was turning morbid—a condition that in its outcome shouldered tragedy.

In the long hours of that night, this man, caught up by forces he could not understand and over which he had no control, faced his bitter future and came to a stupendous resolve.

Out of what was it born? Agony. Distorted, twisted, monstrous, but agony. The full flush of pain. Say it was love feeding on itself. No passion is permanent. It is born, flourishes, springs to a climax—disappears. It is beautiful and malevolent. It takes the world into its heart—and it destroys itself. Bruce studied the path up which he had climbed. He held his son in his arms as they stood upon the last mountain top. There were vapors below but they were beautiful. They moved themselves and beckoned. Voices came to him out of their shadows. Into the midst of those mysteries he could not carry Jack.

Had his love dissipated itself? He did not believe so. He was seeing his child across the shadow of the mother. Irritation blocked ecstacy. He considered himself calm. Really, he was forced to the sacrifice. The impulse was irresistible. It was the subconscious call for freedom. It was a revolt: it was murderous mutiny. Perhaps there was vanity—certainly there was vanity. It seemed heroic to rise above love, to trample on a passion.

That he should be able to put his design into execution, he did not doubt. Once in control of his sentiment towards his son, he conceived the rest as easy. That was the colossal task—it was at that point that he pressed against the immovable. Not at once, not in an instant, not by one supreme act of will, was this to be accomplished. In his madness he yet sensed this, and he planned for the slow and painful death of the fairest flower in his life.

In the days that followed he made a discovery that was to hold with him through future black moments. He found that the inevitable, once squarely faced and acknowledged, was beaten. It was, by this mental act, robbed of its power and its terror.

The destruction of a passion probably amounts to no more than reaching a point at which one is in control rather than controlled. Bruce had been held in the grasp of his love for Jack. The time came when he was no longer thus held. The uncontrollable yielded to his direction. Did he love his son less? Let the mystics decide. To Bruce it appeared no less, but it was less destructive. He believed the passion still held, but he had set up a new center around which to revolve—and that center was death.

He had guided his feet into that path and he did not look backwards. He but waited the time when his will, no longer directed by an outside influence, should respond to his desire. As he went about his work, he watched for the moment, and the moment came. He had subdued Jack; that is to say, by obscure and morbid processes, he had stepped into a higher mental life, where the emotions were subordinate and the intellect reigned.

At this point he subjected his resolution to a new analysis. He considered life and its

pains, and death and its release. What had life to offer? Regrets and blighted hopes and misadventure. In the end—death. In the state in which he then found himself, it appeared the part of wisdom to embrace, at once, the finality. Delay could only add fuel to suffering.

Yet he who had not yet lived courted life. It was noxious, but it fascinated. It was a long march of pain, but there were wayside pleasures. Its goal was annihilation, but the goal was removed and the world was beautiful. He would join the innumerable caravan, but he would remain part of the living pageant.

It had seemed to Bruce that, once free of his thraldom to Jack, he should have no hesitancy in moving to the end. He could at last view with unheightened pulse a separation from his son. The chains were severed. He was free. The disposition of his life was in his own hands. He held back; he faced the issue and turned away. He stopped short of the supreme decision. He sought other solutions of his problem and found none.

In this distracted condition, he was not a pleasant companion. Cora was as irresponsible as he. They were as the blind beating each other. She beheld him change in his attitude toward Jack. It was subtle, but it did not escape her. It was a new grievance. He was harking back to his old nature, to the nature out of which he had been lifted by his contacts in St. Paul. Long since he had ceased to tell her what was in his heart. Now stern-faced and silent he came and went, aloof, distrait, centered on some secret problem. Unable to endure his silence, she sought to force a confession.

"Bruce, why don't you tell me what you're thinking about?"

"Nothing so very interesting."

"You're worried. I have a right to know."

"Not worried—just busy."

"Oh, busy! You think that ought to satisfy me. Anything to put me off. I won't stand it. You've found another woman. I know."

"That isn't true, Cora."

"How dare you sit there and say that? You must think I'm blind. All right, go to her. I don't care. Go to her. But don't you dare come back to me. Oh, I don't see why God ever made men."

On his way down town he stopped to see Doctor Riley. He was admitted to the private office.

"Sit down, Bruce," Riley said. "There's a woman in the consulting room. I'll be back in a minute."

On the desk near which Bruce sat was an emergency case containing many small vials, filled with various drugs. Bruce looked at them idly, thinking of Cora and what he should say to Riley. His attention was arrested. He was staring at a bottle upon which were the words: "Morphine ¼ grain." His hand shot forward and he took the bottle from the case; into the palm of his hand he poured twenty tablets, taking care to count them. He replaced the vial, wrapped the poison in a bit of paper and put it in his pocket.

He considered this opportunity as a hint from Fate. He had not yet reached a decision, but he had the means of making a decent exit. Riley returned.

"Go down and see Cora, Doc," he said. "Her nerves are shot to smithereens. Needs a

tonic, or something."

"Pretty lonely for her, I suppose."

"Yes. I suggested she go home, but she doesn't seem to favor that idea."

"All right. I'll step in and see her. How are you? Don't look any too husky."

"Nothing the matter with me. Rest wouldn't do any harm but that'll come in time."

"Take care of yourself. We couldn't afford to have anything happen to you."

* * * * * * * *

Alone in his cubby hole of an office, Bruce sat at his desk and thought. He was armed. He took out the morphine and looked at it. Harmless in appearance, what a power it held! It was master of pain and death. It was sharper than the sword of Damocles, more potent than Socrates' hemlock. It was wiser than Solomon: it could answer all his questions. Its effects were beatific; it could smooth out the furrowed brow, bring peace to the sick heart, quiet the raging of a mind distressed. He had but to decide. The simple gesture of raising these tablets to his mouth would end all.

He could not raise them. He looked into his mind and found himself enacting a drama —a drama that brushed tragedy. In that moment he hated himself. He was a play-actor, an emotion, a mere phrase. He put the poison away. But he did not destroy it. It was portentious, this act of retaining the morphine. He would use it and he would not use it. He struggled to subdue nature and nature laughed at him. The wine of life had not yet turned bitter.

For days he played with the thought. He could not escape it. It fascinated and it revolted. It cajoled him. It lured him with promises of a long rest. It terrified with images of blackness. Life called out to him, and his youth answered it. Its caprice and its madness, its loneliness and its beauty laid hold of him. It was futile and it was empty,—but it was life. He would have ended the argument but he could not. He loathed himself for his lack of decision. In this way his vanity was touched. Had he not strength to die? Must he remain a slave to the thing he despised? All is vanity, sayeth the preacher. He became grim. He was flushing toward determination. Perhaps this persistent inward looking drove him mad. Who knows?

He rose from his desk one afternoon and the struggle was ended. He had drunk the bitterest draught. He had decided. Peace came to him. A few hours only remained. He set about putting his house in order. The details were trivial. His sense of proportions had changed or died.

He was neither depressed nor elated by his determination. He was calm, life's forces moving slowly in him, as though quieting for the final dissolution. He experienced no bitterness. His life had not fruited as he had planned but that now seemed inconsequential. He was approaching, deliberately, the end to which all men come. A few days more or less—the difference was slight. In the eyes of eternity the birth and the death of the world must occur simultaneously.

He telephoned to the Chisholm House and engaged a room for the night. That would be better. Not at the office and not at home must this thing be done. He closed his desk. He rose and went out. Evening was at hand. He was leaving the office for the last time, but he was unmoved by any sentiment of regret. He looked out towards the sun burning red in the West; the sight was without significance. It crossed his mind that when it set

tomorrow—a shrug checked the thought. Millions, now dead, had seen it set. Millions unborn—it was a futile world.

As he walked the street, he thought of Jack, but he thought of him without agitation. He was too young to be hurt by this sudden separation and, whether his father lived or died, his destiny was in his own hands.

He thought of Cora. The shock would be frightful, but the blow would fall through her vanity. She would recover. Other times, other men. Doubtless, in the way of women, she would enshrine him, forget his faults, remember only the man she had once loved.

In these reflections he was strangely without emotion. They no longer touched him, but had become distant, a matter for mild speculation.

His name, shouted, forced its way into his consciousness. He who was already dead was attacked by a living voice.

"Bruce! Bruce! You're just the man I wanted to see." Senator Sprague, a large featured, large handed dominant servant of the people, was at his side.

"Oh, hello, Frank. I didn't know you were in town." To himself Bruce's voice sounded unnatural: It reeked of cerements.

"Just got back. Been down to Duluth jawin' with some of the boys. . . . Cold as hell out here. Come on in. I got something to say." The senator's hand was opening the door to his office. Bruce hesitated. It was unreal; it was preposterous. He was interrupted in the midst of the last rites. "Come in, for the love of Mike, before we freeze." Bruce went in.

"Here. Wait a minute. I'm chilled to the bone." Sprague produced a bottle and two glasses and poured out generous drinks. Bruce smiled. A drink? Why not? He had plenty of time. Minutes were no longer precious. A mild glow ran through him as the liquor touched the beat of the heart. He glanced at the desk clock. It was six-thirty. An hour, two hours—no matter. Before the hands on that clock stood at twelve—

"You're damned quiet tonight. What's the matter with you?" Sprague asked. The Senator's eyes were keen and straight, though they may have been a shade too near each other. He turned them now to Bruce's face and studied his young friend. "You're plottin' some damned nonsense, but you just wait 'till you hear what I got to say."

He poured out more drinks, drew his chair close, and laid an intimate finger on Bruce's knee, as he asked:

"How would you like to go to Congress?"

With a steady hand Bruce raised his glass and sipped the whiskey. How would he like to go to Congress? Once he had drunk that home-brewed wine. That was before he had died. Since that time he had stripped himself and walked naked into the night; he had lost himself in his own shadow; he had taken the treasure out of the core of his heart and tossed it into an abyss. At this moment, when he was unclothed and empty, life was hurling itself at him.

"It's up to you. I talked it over in Duluth and I don't mind telling you it was me who suggested your name. What do you say?"

"That you're kidding yourself or me," Bruce answered. "Nobody knows me in this district. There are dozens of more available candidates. Why don't you grab the place?"

Sprague explained at length. He himself had his eye on the United States senatorship

to succeed Moses E. Clapp. That let him out. As to the dozens to whom Bruce referred, they narrowed down to two or three compromise chaps. The rest were all colored with iron ore. Even the two or three had a tinge of the red about them. Bruce hadn't. No one could raise the yell of steel at his candidacy.

"But the boys know you," he concluded, "and they know they can depend on you."

"It's all perfectly plain and I tell you flatly I don't want it," Bruce said. "It interferes with plans I have made."

Then Sprague talked. He expended his eloquence in an effort to persuade Bruce to change his mind. He painted pictures of the power and prestige of a congressman, of the allurements of Washington, of the height to which Bruce with his youth and eloquence might climb. They separated at last on the understanding that Bruce would give his answer in a day or two.

"In an hour or two," Bruce thought as he went away from Sprague's office, "the answer may be accomplished."

He had not abandoned his determination to die. An escape from the morbid introspection that was scourging him to the grave did not reveal itself in the life of a congressman. If it had come earlier—At that he was held. To accept this place so tendered would be to make himself the tool of others—a pawn in the hands of masters. His instinct rose in instant rebellion. The hireling of another! Death was preferable. Some man, some underling, would accept the nomination and the voters, in ignorance and party prejudice would elect this creature—and curse him afterwards.

To prevent that, to beat this clique, to tear the scales from the eyes of people—that would be a fight worth making. The thought thrilled him, it set him pulsing towards life. He entered into a compromise with himself. This one last fight, and afterwards——

The morphine remained harmlessly in his pocket and he directed his feet homeward.

Two days later Bruce was in Senator Sprague's office. The light of the fanatic illuminated his face. During the interval he had communicated with friends in Duluth—men who were in favor of clean politics. They were joined with him in the fight he was about to make. The odds were overwhelmingly against them—unless the people could be roused. There were signs that they were stirring, moving uneasily in their sleep. Colonel Roosevelt was talking revolt and the old guard was shaking in its shoes.

Sprague heard what his young friend had to say, a half-smile playing around his lips and eyes as he listened. It was fine talk, fired with determination, brightened with hope. It was straight and true: the voice of a man breathing his convictions. He interrupted to say:

"My God, Bruce, if you can keep that tone they'll elect you president."

In chagrin and fury, Bruce flung out:

"Isn't it possible, Frank, to make you understand that I mean what I say?"

"Of course you mean it. Hell! What would be the use of it if you didn't mean it. Everybody that hears you will know you mean it. I told the boys you had the goods."

"Get it into your head that I'm not going to accept a nomination that binds my hands and commits me to a cut and dried program."

"All right, all right. But you're a Republican, ain't you?"

"No. Not the kind you mean. As far as I can see right now I'll be a Roosevelt man in

this campaign."

"Don't be a fool. Roosevelt's done. He's through. Why do you want to tie up to a sinkin' ship?"

"Because, sink or float, it's right."

"You'll ask the nomination as a Republican, won't you?"

"No. I'll ask it as a Progressive-Republican."

"Then you won't get it. There ain't no such animal in this district, and you know it. There ain't enough Bull Moose up here to get your name on the ticket by petition. You don't want to do anything or talk anything that ain't in line with honest Republican sentiment. Take what you can get and do your reformin' in the House. God knows, you'll have plenty of chance there."

Bruce smiled knowingly:

"Branded for life. They'd kill me off the instant I tried to run wild."

"Stay with the herd, then."

"That's exactly what I won't do."

"Trouble with you, young smart Alecks, is you know more than all the wise old fellows put together."

"No, you've got me wrong. I don't know a thing about practical politics, I don't know a thing about government and don't pretend to. But I know I'm opposed to the boss—I don't care whether he's one man or twenty. That's the thing I'm out against in this campaign. I've told you. You and I don't need to quarrel but we can't play politics together."

Sprague got up and moved around the office. The half-smile was gone from his face. He was entirely serious. He stopped with his back to the stove and stood looking at Bruce.

"I drank that same sort of stuff fifteen years ago," he said. "It's as natural as cutting teeth. The world was out of joint. Oh, cursed spite. It's always out of joint to the young fellow, Bruce. Always has been, always will be. Maybe that's the way we've come up, an inch at a time. Don't know. Hell's full of kids who died off tryin' to reform a people that didn't want to be reformed. I tried it. I kicked against the pricks. No use. You simply get yourself spiked and slaughtered. I ain't an angel, God knows. I done a lot of things would been better left undone. But everything ain't been bad. I might have done the bad things if I'd stuck to the crusade and I wouldn't have had a chance to do the little good I have done. Get that? It's the impossible best that blinds you youngsters. Put that out of your head. Fall in line. You'll have plenty of reforms to work for inside the old party."

"Can't do it, Frank. I probably won't live long and I've got to make this fight if it's the last thing I ever do."

"God in Heaven, how young you are!"

Back of Bruce lingered the shadow of his resolve to die. That, probably, accounts for the recklessness with which he threw himself into the contest. He counted no cost of place or health. He had nothing but time and strength to give and he gave both in full measure. The paper, his chief weapon, became after a bit his chief burden. He had not the time to

attend to it. He appealed to Cora and she went into the office in his place. Surprisingly she developed a faculty for the work and in a short time Bruce's presence was not essential to the paper's prosperity.

It was only after she had been some time in the office that Cora realized what Bruce was doing. She had been thrilled by his campaign and confident of his success. A slight initiation into politics, incident to her control of the paper, opened her eyes. Sprague confirmed the opinion at which she had arrived. She was horror struck. Confusion and ruin stared her in the face. Bruce was destroying himself. More, he was dragging her and Jack into the general catastrophe. She rebelled at the senseless sacrifice.

Bruce's home-coming that week end was not pleasant. Cora did not choose her words. She said what was in her mind. As she became angry she became personal. She riddled his conceit with rude shots. She was heavily sarcastic and her ridicule was not easy to endure. She had no conception of the flaming ideal that inspired her husband. Her political knowledge began and ended with the fact that there were two parties and that only a Republican could be elected. Bruce was neither one thing nor the other. He was following a kite that had no tail. People were laughing at him. That was a bitter pill for her. He was losing friends, not making them. He'd always been a Republican, hadn't he? Now, when of all times he should stay with his party he was deserting it. It didn't look sensible. Was he crazy? What could he hope to gain? He wasn't born to be a reformer. What was there to reform? Everybody was getting along all right. Roosevelt? Oh, he was a back number. He'd had his fling. Now he was sore at Taft or somebody and trying to make the country fight his personal quarrel. Nobody had said that to her. She couldn't help it if it did sound like Sprague. Sprague was no fool and if she happened to think the same as he did that only proved she was right. She hated Bruce's editorials—hated to run them in her paper. No one took them seriously now—since he had gone off on this wild tangent.

It was in vain that Bruce tried to explain. She was shrewd enough to see defeat where he still hoped. Success was what she wanted and failure looked out at her. Bitterness clothed Bruce. He lost the sound of her voice in dreaming of the time when he had endowed this woman with ideals. Had they been merely faint reflections of what was in himself? He drank his hemlock and the draught strengthened him for the fight.

The task he had set for himself was impossible of accomplishment. It was impossible because, as Cora said, "everyone was getting along all right." He could stir the voters who came to hear him to a momentary response—he could not light a fire in their souls. He could not strike off the fetters of party allegiance. They were sheep accustomed to being led and they reposed confidence in their shepherds. It was hopeless. He beat his fists against bars of steel—worse, against stolid minds, an aggregation of people who were "getting along all right."

The defeat Cora had foreseen met him. It was overwhelming. He had made no impression upon the dumb, indifferent masses.

There was an edge to Cora's rebukes. It was as though she had been sharpened by the triumphant fulfillment of her prophesy. Bruce stared at her in an amazed effort to understand. She treated him as if he were a child who had been properly chastised—she hoped it would be a lesson to him. She had no glimpse of the deep meaning of this failure. She passed over the débris of ideals and shattered illusion with firm, confident feet. She was magnificent in her mediocre conception of right and wrong.

All the while, in her husband's pocket, lay the tablets of morphine, unseen and unsensed by this woman who dreamed of a husband who should be the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Bruce knew of their presence. He fondled the idea anew and realized, in bitterness, that the hour had gone by. He had been robbed of the final gesture. He believed that, but for the intervention of a drifting straw, he should have accomplished his purpose. But even that he came in time to doubt. He had been too ready to temporize. Had his resolve, he told himself, been firm and fixed, he would have realized the futility of one more fight. What could one more fight mean to a man who was lying down in his coffin? Now the madness that had prompted the effort was dissipated. He no longer wanted to die. As a paradox, he no longer wanted to live.

He reviewed the effect of his defeat. He had not expected to win, but he had expected —something. What? A response? An understanding? An appreciation? A planting for a future harvest? None of these things had come to him. It had been barren ground.

In the midst of these reflections he was caught with the thought: What if he had succeeded? By what energy, as of a giant wrestling with black magic, could he have accomplished those things of which he had talked so glibly? The horror of his useless striving, in that case, beat upon him. He was worn and broken by a struggle he had not been called upon to make. Vanity of vanity.

There must be some escape, but whither? He was lost in a futile world—a meaningless, mad world. To this existence that others accepted as sane, he had not the key. It was empty. Life and death insanely alternated. The wisest passed and the new ignorant stood in their places. The wisest were little children unable to spell the scroll that life unrolled before them. He was overwhelmed with the futility of an existence that had no meaning. The time came when even death seemed no longer worth while.

But an escape in some form bore upon him as a necessity. He went to Duluth and fled thence from the gibes of his friends to St. Paul. At the capitol they laughed at him or tried, seriously, to talk him back to reason. He had bolted, but he was young and he could return to the fold. They would hold no grudge. Youth must have its fling. They had all gone through the same searing phase. Their words were meaningless since he was no longer interested in the lives they lived. He cursed them for their folly, drank with them, and went his way pondering the ugly, misshapen problem his own life presented.

What was it he wanted? An escape. From what? The hard knots he could never untie. Those he would carry with him. The friends whom he knew too well. He would make new friends and they would be as the old. From Cora? He lingered at that, turning the thought over and over in his mind. Love had gone out of his life. He had set his foot upon emotion and sentiment. Yet his desire to be free from Cora was urgent and would not be denied.

She had been running the paper during his campaign and was still in charge of it. Her management was successful. In their last talk he had learned that she did not want to leave the office. He was relieved, thus, of financial worry. Once the idea had taken possession of his mind he could not escape it. He held it, considering the obstacles. None was insurmountable. A decision was arrived at. If it were to be done it were best done quickly. He wired Cora he was returning at once. He did not tell her he was coming for a last interview but he had no reason to believe she would be anxious to hold him. There had been no companionship between them for five years. The sympathy he had coveted and

prized faded before his mother's illness and vanished during that ordeal. Nothing had been able to restore it. They were a sadly mated pair and the brave thing was to cut the useless knot.

Cora had arrayed herself in her smartest dress to welcome him. The work she had done on the paper had helped her. Ragged nerves had mended themselves, activity had improved her health, bringing back the sparkle to her eye, the elasticity to her step. And she had learned some things. She discovered that running a paper meant work. The men at the office had talked and she came to appreciate the long hours of drudgery through which Bruce had toiled. She was contrite, humiliated. She was prepared to make amends, to re-establish herself as the wife of her husband.

Cora was disquieted by Bruce's appearance. Her prescience told her a change had been worked in him, that she was on the verge of a new departure.

After dinner they sat in the living-room. Bruce had played with Jack, but Cora noticed that the old animation was gone. Jack told them good-night and was taken away to bed. Cora waited. She was frightened, but she knew not at what. The atmosphere of the room was bodeful.

Bruce found it was not easy to say the thing he had come to say. He was facing a new Cora, one that was more nearly the girl he had courted and married. Had she remained the same. . . . But he was hungry for the far places and for freedom.

A feeling of desperation grew up in Cora. She was losing and she must not lose. A light glowed in her dark eyes and her cheeks were flushed.

"Bruce, do you remember 'Little Eyolf—the home-coming of Alfred? That reminds me of us. Like Rita I have put on my finest dress for your welcome." Her heavy lids shaded her eyes. "And there was champagne on the table—but you didn't drink."

He was unmoved. This woman no longer stirred him. There had been a time. . . . His pulse was slow and steady. He believed, honestly, that the fever of life was burned out.

"Cora," he said, "I've got to talk to you—not in the way you expect, maybe. I came home on purpose for that. I don't know what's happened—or, yes, I do. Many little things. Anyway, we don't feel towards each other the way we did once."

"I do, Bruce, I do."

"I doubt it, but it doesn't matter. I can only speak for myself."

"And you don't?"

"No. I hate to be blunt, Cora, but it isn't easy to say. I want to go away. There, now you know."

"Where to, Bruce? And—and just what do you mean?"

"To New York—and farther. Forever—and alone."

"You want to leave me, Bruce, and never come back?"

He was caught by a desire to temporize, but he fought back the impulse. He set himself for the final blow.

"Yes, that's what I want to do."

"You can leave me. I know that, I've known that for a long time. But what about Jack? Can you leave him so easily?"

"I don't say it will be easy. . . . I can do it. It will be easier than trying to go on."

“All right, Bruce. Apparently I have nothing to say about this.” She paused for a moment as though expecting a reply, hoping for an encouraging word, and then continued: “You’re a strange man. You can just calmly walk off and abandon your wife and baby. I think you must be a little insane. No normal person could do that. I don’t see how I deserve this treatment at your hands. I’ve done what I could for you. I bore you a son. But that means nothing to you. You haven’t been very easy to live with, Bruce, and you haven’t been very nice the last three years. I put up with it, because you can be so wonderful when you like, Bruce. After all this, you come and tell me you are going to desert me. Don’t contradict me. That’s what it amounts to. I’m only a woman with a baby—and powerless. What can I do? I can’t hold you, but I don’t consent, Bruce. If you go away—oh, if! I know you’re going. You can be hard as flint and perfectly ruthless. You thought I didn’t know that. I know you, Bruce, better than you can ever dream of knowing yourself. You’ll find no one in the world to know you as I do, to forgive you and understand, to watch over you, and believe in you.” Her tears stopped her.

“I’m not looking for any one, Cora. I know, better than you do, that there is no love left in life for me. That part of me is dead. But I want to see things, and I want to escape. . . . This is painful. Can’t we end it, now? I’ll get the two o’clock train to Duluth.”

“Don’t, please, go tonight, Bruce!”

“What’s to be gained by delay? It will be easier for each to get it over with.”

“Yes, go, go. What difference can a few hours make?”

He rose and moved aimlessly around the room. It was warm and pleasant—and it was his home. He sat down at the desk and wrote her a bill of sale, transferring title in the personal property. He left the paper lying on the desk and turned to the book shelves. It was a bitter moment. These were his friends. There was scarcely a volume in which he had not written verses or jotted down random thoughts. They were his notebooks, his intimates, the repository of his emotions. He selected *Tristram Shandy* and Carlyle’s *French Revolution* and put them in his bag. He would gladly have gathered them all in his arms and taken them away with him.

“I should like, Cora, if you can manage it, to have Jack get my books.”

“Oh, don’t talk like that. You are driving me mad!” She covered her face with her hands, stifling her sobs.

Bruce stood looking down upon her. She was pitiful. The whole scene was tragic, humiliating, frightful. He trembled, but his lips set grimly. He brushed his hand over his eyes and turned away. If he could only stay! They were parted by a universe and no angel came to guide them back to each other’s side.

He closed his bag and he took up his coat.

“Aren’t you going in to see Jack?”

He put down his coat. His face was white. His eyes were dry and burning. “Yes,” he said and he passed into his son’s room. He turned on the light at the head of the bed. Jack lay with a little fist doubled under his flushed cheek. His eyelashes were heavy and dark. His hair had been cut short, “like Daddy’s.” He breathed easily and dreamed pleasantly, for a smile flitted across his lips.

Bruce sat down on the edge of the bed. He took a moist little hand in his and held it close, gently. The nape of the neck was in shadow, but he knew it was a wonderful spot to

kiss and he bent his lips to it. He laid his hand on his son's brow, and the gesture was a benediction. He kissed the cheeks and, for an instant, his lips touched those of his son. He put the exposed hand back beneath the blanket and for the last time tucked his son in snugly for the night. He extinguished the light and went out.

There were black circles under his eyes that had not been there when he entered that room.

Cora still wept. Bruce, as one moving in a trance, took up his coat and put it on. Mechanically he drew on his gloves and found his hat. He stooped to pick up his bag but left it and went to stand in front of his wife.

As he looked down at her he saw, with great clarity, a stone church, the entrance of which was bowered with moss roses. Down the street, through the June sunshine, came his mother to meet him and his bride. She saw them and for a breathing second turned her head away. The pain of that moment returned to him. In the fullness of time the tragedy was complete. . . .

BOOK III

WAR AND MARGARETE

WAR AND MARGARETE

I

AT the iron gate that barred the entrance to the basement at 317 West Twenty-ninth Street, Bruce rang the bell. A girl, with burnished black hair and white skin, appeared beyond the bars.

"I should like to get a room, Madame, if possible," Bruce explained.

The girl drew back. "What? I don' spik English ver' well." She turned towards the interior of the house and called, "Josephine."

Josephine came and Bruce repeated his inquiry.

"But who sent you here?" Josephine asked.

"No one. Did some one have to send me? I was looking for a room and I liked the appearance of your house."

"But, yes, some one told you. No?"

"I'm sorry. No one did."

"It is impossible."

Another woman materialized at Josephine's elbow. She was small and dark and alert and she spoke rapidly. Josephine explained to her, in French, that a miracle had taken place.

"And no one at all sent you, Monsieur?" the dark woman asked.

Bruce smiled at her. It was humorous, this insistence. "No one, Madame. But I should like a room."

The two women looked at each other. The dark one threw back the latch of the gate. "Come in, Monsieur."

He entered and found himself in a large room containing very little furniture. Through a door that led to the rear he could see a garden and tables and chairs filling it. He knew then he had stumbled into some kind of a restaurant. Josephine did the honors.

"This is my sister, Mademoiselle Marie Petitpas, Monsieur——"

"Darton, Bruce Darton." He found a card and gave it to her.

"You are, perhaps, an artest?" Marie asked.

"No. I'm a newspaper man."

"Oh," said Josephine, "a writer."

"You know Mr. Yeats, yes? The great painter?" Marie asked.

Again Bruce smiled at her, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. I don't know any painters."

"Not one?" Marie cried. "Mon dieu! and New York is full of them."

"But I am a stranger. I have just come from the West."

"O-o-h," said Josephine and looked at Marie.

"Now about the room," Bruce said. "If you have one vacant—oh, anything. I'm not

fussy."

"We have one," admitted Marie. "Celestine will show you. It is on the third floor, next to Mr. Yeats' room. Celestine?"

The room was satisfactory. "How much?" Bruce asked.

Celestine shrugged. "I don' know. My sester know."

They came down again to the basement. Marie was busy in the kitchen and Josephine took charge of him.

"Will you want meals also, Mr. Darton?"

"Yes, certainly. At any rate lunch and dinner."

"Exactly. Then it will be twelve dollars a week," said Josephine and she looked at him kindly, as though inclined to add, "Or what can you afford to pay?"

Bruce assured her the price was satisfactory. He paid her for a week in advance and went away to get his bags. The prosaic business of finding a room had turned into an adventure, of what nature he could not yet decide.

In that far away and different world of 1913 a great hotel stood at Forty-second Street and Broadway—the Knickerbocker, now only a name and a memory, like the Manhattan, St. Dennis, Claridge, Jack's, Martin's and Rector's. It was at the Knickerbocker that Bruce spent his first night in New York and on that memorable evening he saw "Fanny's First Play." Afterwards he went to the Pekin where he got his first glimpse of the great city enjoying itself. He looked upon the drinking, noisy revellers with half-critical eyes and decided that "noise and cocktails were the chief ingredients in the New Yorker's salad of joy."

As he went towards the Knickerbocker very late that night, Broadway, the long sinuous street, was a blaze of light and thousands of people went up and down, feverishly—intent upon some secret, eager quest.

He had no intention of wasting his money, a scant horde, on a high-priced room at a hotel, and the next day he had gone out in search of more modest quarters. He had lunched at Mouquin's, on Sixth Avenue, near Twenty-eighth Street, and when he came out it was merely chance that had set his face to the West. He walked across Twenty-eighth Street to Ninth Avenue, inquired at one or two places that offered "rooms," but found nothing suitable.

Turning East on Twenty-ninth Street, he had been attracted to Petitpas by a flower-bed in the yard and a certain air of cleanliness about the place. There was no placard inviting him to ask for a room but he had tried at a venture. Thus blindly he had walked in to one of the most interesting places in the city.

The three Petitpas sisters were from Brittany and they were making their fortunes in the new world. They were shrewd but generous, severe but kind-hearted. Tolerant toward their favorites but dictatorial toward those whom they did not like. Their gate was barred against inquisitive strangers and one dined there by appointment only.

Bruce, returning with his bags, was established in his room. It was large and airy and looked out upon a wide and comparatively quiet street. He was at peace. No regret stirred in him. He would go forward yet a little while and then—

When he descended to the basement he found the garden full of diners. Josephine

seated him and a moment later Celestine placed a plate of soup in front of him.

Across the end of the garden, farthest from the street, extended a long table, at the head of which sat an old man, bald, full-bearded, with intelligent, luminous eyes, half hidden behind steel-rimmed spectacles. He talked without ceasing but Bruce was too far away to hear what he said. He talked against the rattle of dishes, the buzz of conversation from the small tables that filled the rest of the garden. Those at the long table listened. They were sitting at the feet of wisdom and they were silent.

To Bruce it was an experience, a revelation. In the world to which he had been accustomed, men had talked against each other; they had told stories, indulged in horseplay, rapped out personalities but—they had not listened. The wisest of them could command the attention of the others for only a moment. Into what manner of life had he drifted?

Josephine came with a platter of chicken following the entrée. Bruce looked up at her.

"Mademoiselle, who is the gentleman at the head of the long table."

"Mester Yeats."

"Yes. Who is Mr. Yeats?"

"An artest, a painter. Hes son es the poet."

"His son? You mean William Butler Yeats?"

"But, yes. You know hem?"

"My God," said Bruce. "His father! Mademoiselle, are you sure?"

"Certainement. I know hem for years." She went away, reappeared with a bowl of salad, came and went, efficient, swift, severe. The man at the head of the table continued to talk.

There was a bottle of claret at the elbow of each guest; it was part of the menu. Bruce sipped his but found it unpalatable.

"You don't drenk?" asked Celestine, solicitously.

"Not tonight, thank you."

Fruit was served and coffee. A few of the diners disappeared. A mechanical piano in the front rooms started playing ragtime. A dozen couples went inside and Bruce could see them whirling past the door to the syncopation of the music. Mr. Yeats leaned back in his chair smoking a long cigar and the first words Bruce heard him say were:

"Another bottle, Mademoiselle, if you please."

II

AT luncheon the next day Bruce sat with Mr. Yeats. The artist was interested in his new acquaintance and he asked questions—direct, personal questions, with the simplicity of a child, and he waited with evident eagerness for the answers. He was not asking, Bruce sensed, out of idle curiosity, but because he wanted the material out of which to build a background for this young American. He would say:

"I can't see him. I don't know anything about him."

In his intense, careful way, he was trying to see Bruce.

During the afternoon, he came into Bruce's room and talked. He mentioned "my son, the poet." Bruce grew animated and praised the Irish bard, referring among other things to "The Land of Heart's Desire." Yeats, the father, was inclined to poo-poo that effort, but he was full of praise for many of the lyrics.

When they spoke of Singe they were on safer ground. There was no restraint. They vied with each other in singing praises to the dramatist.

At dinner that night, Bruce sat at Mr. Yeats' left hand. The artist had requested Josephine to make this arrangement and for many months Bruce sat next to the great man, listening to him, honoring him, loving him.

Under the influence of Mr. Yeats, Bruce sat down once more to try and write. As a page of manuscript was finished he took it to Mr. Yeats who read and criticised it. So working, he finished a story. It was a good story. Obviously, not good enough. It would not sell. Bruce did not start another. Often Mr. Yeats said:

"Ah, Darton, why don't you write another story. We had such good times when you were writing that other one."

Why did he not write—he who had felt ever within him the urge for that form of expression? He had opportunity and he could command the assistance of a wise and experienced man. Yet he remained idle. In Bruce's mind, his life was finished—but for a bit of play and sightseeing. He had parted forever with the serious things. The precious freight with which his ship had been loaded had been tossed overboard, to keep the craft afloat. He was no longer interested in himself but he looked with keen delight into the hearts and lives of others. He did not criticise; he was amused or touched and he became very tender toward the unreasoning foibles that were dangled before his eyes. It may be that he had lost his perspective; at any rate one thing seemed as important as another, and none of them, in the face of the slow, destructive march of Time, was worth while, worth a man's serious effort—always presupposing that there was any such thing possible as a serious effort.

He watched the life at Petitpas and was amused. He saw quarrels, love affairs, ambitions, conceits; he heard boasting, scandal, flattery, praise; he beheld selfishness and generosity, jealousy and faith, good deeds and bad, kind and cruel. He poured this hodgepodge into his crucible, reduced it, and it came out identical in appearance and all light as air. It was a mere nothing. The breaking heart of tonight was giddy with joy

tomorrow. The fleeting emotion of the moment was dominant. There was no substance. It was all sound and fury.

Thus occupied, his money was going. He was indifferent. Purely as a reflex action he looked for work. His effort was less than half-hearted; he had no desire to find a place, and he found none.

The summer passed. He had become familiar with New York. He had gone into its by-ways and seen its life in the raw. He had wandered through the Ghetto, heard the screaming children, stared at the bewigged, fat women; had watched the bearded men with their pushcarts and listened to their strange language. He had sat in their restaurants, eaten of "gefilltefisch" and "a nice piece of meat." He had drunk their wine and played chess with them.

He had gone into the Turkish quarter, eaten their spiced food and sipped their black, incredible coffee.

He had gone out to Far Rockaway, captivated by the name, and counted the pulse of the great ocean. He had bathed at Long Beach and had sailed up the Hudson, passed the grim, disdainful Palisades, passed the sight of the hospital in which his mother had wasted her strength. He cursed and was smitten anew with a great grief. That illness and that death seemed the last touch of reality in his life.

In the fall he went out with Roberts, a friend picked up at Petitpas, to the Anarchist Ball at Lenox Casino. The hall was large but it was filled with people who were very warm and were not sweet. He wandered among them with Roberts, and was introduced to two or three, among them Polly, who was not yet famous, but who was soon to open a restaurant in Greenwich Village and have her name spread across the continent. He met a Miss Rubin and left Roberts to go and talk to the dark vivacious Jewess. She led him to her aunt and introduced him. The aunt was big, strong featured, emphatic, and she smoked, constantly, black cigarettes. Bruce accepted one but found it sickeningly strong and surreptitiously got rid of it.

The women talked in high-pitched voices about their friends who passed them dancing. Few of their remarks were complimentary: the virtues seemed centered in themselves, the vices were scattered abroad. They had no conversation that was not gossip. The aunt had been born and had grown to young womanhood in Russia. Bruce questioned her. He would have been glad to learn from her something of that bewildering country. She refused to enlighten him. Bruce did not realize that a pogrom, that murder and torture were back of her silence. He attributed her reluctance to stupidity and gave up the effort. He danced with the niece, but the air in the room was stifling and he returned her to the aunt and went away, not stopping to look for Roberts.

He left the dance having gained but one idea: that most of the anarchists were Jews and that they were fat and danced too boisterously and were not sweet. In time, he somewhat modified that opinion, but he had, until that night, had no experience of anarchists and he had not been in New York long enough to become familiar with Jews.

His utterly aimless existence continued. He made no effort to find employment; he did not respond to Mr. Yeats' entreaties that he go on with his writing. He drifted and played. He played at chess, at billiards, at tennis and, occasionally, took part in a small game of poker, at which there was more drinking than gambling and in which the winner went

broke spending his gains. His mother's words recurred to him: "The time will come, Bruce, when you will want to play." Had that time come? He did not know. He played—intensely, fiercely, but without joy in the game, with joy only in the quieting effect of the effort.

Chess, a slight knowledge of which he had acquired from his father as a child, and in which he had retained an interest because of an instinctive skill that made him better than the average player, now brought him friends and opened to him the doors of private homes. He delighted in the supreme concentration of the game, the mental dexterity it brought into play, the subtle, yet essential, psychology of the contest. Yes, chess touched some deep responsive chord in his nature. Yet he remembered a time. . . .

The Minnesota prairies were covered with snow, rapidly disappearing in the teeth of a warm March wind. It was ideal for snow fights and he and Clarence, with others, were engaged in a wild battle. At eight nothing is so important as moulding a good snowball and sending it home with precision. He was absorbed, lost, in the sport.

"Your dad's callin' yo', Bruce."

His father stood at the entrance of his home, bare headed, his long hair lifted by the wind. How tall he seemed and how old! He was nearing the end. That disease of the throat would yield neither to the knife nor medicine. A few agonized months remained to him. Only in the midst of mental concentration could be, momentarily, forget the pain that choked him, tore at him, dragged the life out of him.

All of this was, of course, hidden from the boy. He knew only that his father had a lump in his throat. He had no conception of pain and was therefore without sympathy.

"Come and play a game of chess with me, Bruce," the dying man begged.

"Aw, father."

"Come."

"Gee, when we're just gettin' started good. That old chess——"

"Bruce!"

The small mutiny was quelled. He went in, flushed, angry, insolent, outraged. The suffering father ignored the signs of temper. He knew his little son liked the game and he thought he would soon be mollified by the contest. But the South Wind called, and Bruce could hear Clarence and his friends as they shouted their war cry and rushed to the assault. In the bitterness of that moment, he hated chess and he moved his pieces with studied carelessness.

"Bruce, that isn't a good move."

"Aw, I don't know what is good."

"At any rate you know enough not to throw away a piece for nothing."

"I don't care for the old castle."

The pain grabbed at Dr. Darton's throat and he leaned wearily back in his chair. Bruce sat staring at his father's white, writhing face. He was frightened and his ill nature fled. With hot, dirty hands he replaced the men on the board, seeing them dimly through the tears that shame and remorse drove into his eyes.

"Come on, father, let's play."

"In a moment, my son."

His mother appeared with a compress which she placed around her husband's neck. She smoothed it gently into place, pressing it close with firm fingers. Bruce slid out of his chair and went to lean against her, hiding his wet face in her skirt. A hand touched his tumbled hair and the caress increased his wretchedness.

"Go on out with Clarence, Bruce. Father won't want to play again this afternoon."

At that his heart broke. He threw himself on the floor, biting at small fists to keep back the sobs, strangling in his effort at control. This great suffering was his own creation. Dimly he sensed this and, had he but known it, therein was epitomized the tragedy of his life. . . .

It was Roberts, again, who took him to Marshall's Chest Divan. There he met the American champion and they became friends and he learned, for the first time, some of the basic truths of the classic game. He joined the club and became familiar with the habitués—with Brennan, Fredo, Redlich, Bennet, Avery and Martine. Martine was a Frenchman, a miniature Frenchman, who insisted always upon playing at the largest board, with gigantic pieces. So large was the board that it was necessary for him to rise to his feet when moving a piece into his opponent's territory. He was a bad player but an enthusiast and blindly indifferent to the attitude of the men around him.

He sang constantly: "Te dum, te dum, te dum to do, de de," or interrupted his weird attempt at a tune to exclaim, "You go there? That's your move? Well, if that's your name and he's your uncle, I'll go there," and he would slam his piece down with a crash that sought to win by an exuberance of energy. Often he would cry out in a loud voice, "So this is Paris," and every one knew he had lost another game.

Bruce found this diverting and he went day after day to match himself against fine players, to lose often but to learn a little. It was diverting—no more than that, but it was as important as anything which, at that period, entered into his life.

During the winter he decided, over night, to go to London. Why? For no reason. It was an impulse and he followed it blindly. On February 12, 1914, he sailed on board the *Minneapolis* of the Atlantic Transport line. There was a small passenger list but among them was Michael Sadler. He and Bruce became acquainted, grew to be friends, were cronies before the Thames was reached. Sadler was joining Constable and Company and had been in America studying the publishing business with Little, Brown and Company of Boston. He had become interested in Edith Wharton and was, at the moment, writing a book on that author. He showed pages of the manuscript to Bruce who read and discussed them but remained outside the literary heat. It was unimportant. It might be worth while to Sadler but to Bruce, whose eyes had grown far-sighted, it seemed trivial—a nothing in an immensity.

Through Sadler he met Hubert Worthington, and Monroe, and Roger Fry, and he was given a chance to see the far, hidden places in London. He drank Burton's ale on Panton Street, he saw the Jews of Petticoat Lane, he had champagne at sixpence a glass in So Ho. He filled himself with the spirit of old England.

He sat one May evening in Worthington's apartment with half a dozen men who knew England and Europe. Inevitably the question of war came up. The company was unanimous. There would be no war.

"War?" said one. "Between whom, for what? There is nothing to gain by war."

"Quite right," another said. "Your Norman Angell has destroyed that illusion."

"All this talk of Germany preparing for the day is bally rot, you know," said Worthington.

"Rather," said another. "They're deuced clever chaps, you know, those dutchies. Not balmy by any means, I assure you. What?"

Bruce contributed nothing to the discussion. It was barely interesting. War, any considerable war, had gone out of the world. The passions that drove men to battle were no longer operative. They had been carefully removed by the nice hand of civilization. It was no longer a question over which one could get excited. It was about as timely as the problem of who built the pyramids.

Early in June Bruce was back in New York. His return was as purposeless as his departure. He resumed his old way of life but he had very little money left and he took a hall bedroom at Petitpas, with one meal a day. This reduced his expenses one-half. Even that was too much. If he were to continue to live he must find work. Carteret, assistant editor of the *Sunday World*, an enormous, good-natured man whom he had met at Petitpas, helped him, and Clyde West, head of the copy desk at *The American*, gave him a chance.

He was reading copy there when the war bomb exploded and the world rocked to its detonations.

One night early in August he came down Broadway into a multitude gathered at Times Square. England was debating and the vast crowd held its breath. There was a roar. Bedlam broke loose. The bulletin had been flashed: "England declares war on Germany." The shouting died away. Men looked at each other with serious faces. This was no child's play. It was a grim, horrible business.

So the war was ushered in and great headlines blackened the front pages of the papers. There were many tears to be shed and many hearts to be stilled before those gloomy signals of a people's madness disappeared.

Late in August Bruce gave up his job. The times had grown hard for newspaper men. Talented, trained men walked Park Row and found no market for themselves. "Cable expenses," said the editors and turned reporters and copy readers adrift.

Bruce went into the office one evening and while waiting for the hour to strike, talked idly to Snow, an extra, who had sat in at the desk a few times when a regular man was absent.

"This is a hell of a life," Snow said.

"Anything unusual the matter?" Bruce asked.

"Nothing unusual with me. I'm the original lump of bad luck. Wife sick, kid sick, out of a job. If I work two nights a week I'm lucky. West don't give me any encouragement. Says no desk man's goin' to quit these hard times. Ain't life hell?"

"Would you get on if one of the regulars quit?"

"Sure, if— Don't make me laugh. West says he'll give me first shot."

Bruce walked over to the desk. "Hello, West," he said. "Just came in to' tell you I'm through. Sorry, but I'm off the job. Won't inconvenience you. Snow is here panting for a chance. Good-by—and many thanks."

He paused at Snow's side to growl, "Go over and see West. He's got something to say

to you.”

III

HE lived on, tranquil, unconcerned. He saw his money disappearing, but he did not worry. He had no resources and he was indifferent. A man alone can always live—or die. That summed up his philosophy. He had no desire to die; he was merely contemptuous of life.

Late in the fall he was at the end. But he had widened his circle of acquaintances and among these were some from Greenwich Village. He had heard of Polly's, run by the girl he had met at the Anarchist Ball. He visited the place, one could eat for almost nothing there. Almost, not quite. The restaurant was then on Washington Place and was well patronized.

He went again and again. Immediately he became a figure. There were chess players whom the Village rated good. He easily beat them. That gave him prominence and despite his aloof manner, the mystery that enveloped him, he was accepted. There were poker players and he sat in their game and won. He knew more of poker than they did; and, though they lost to him, they welcomed him—stung by defeat, determined eventually to beat him at his own game. He was not an adept, but under the stress of necessity he played better than he knew. He lost occasionally, but his losses were slight. He had learned the great secret of the game: that the man who wins is the man who can keep down his losses and that he that endureth unto the end shall be saved.

He lived that text and lived on it. It kept him from starving.

Life in Greenwich Village was not all poker—not even for Bruce. There were nights when there was no game and he sat in the basement at Polly's and watched the form and the thin substance around him. He saw there young men and women who were later to stand high in the world of art and writing, but hysteria was abroad in the world and they splashed, madly, in its current. The war, as an actuality, had not yet come to America, but its fetid breath was over all, a hot wave that created a mental mirage and destroyed reality. In those strange early days of the conflict, even one's entity became unreal, visionary—a quivering uncertainty.

Colossal forces were at work, consuming an existence to which the world had grown accustomed. Proportions were wiped out and with them went restraint. Things were done that were foreign to bohemia, at which bohemia itself would have been shocked. But there was no bohemia: there was only hysteria. No plans were laid for the future—the mask of uncertainty was over each tomorrow. No one worked but to buy food and no one questioned the idleness of another.

War squandered, blighted, devastated the youth in New York as surely as it did in the long line of trenches in France.

Some glimmering of this truth came to Bruce, seen by him while invisible to others, for he had removed himself from the passions of the world and in rare isolation looked out upon the raging tempest.

Months passed, the winter and the summer of ’15. Polly moved to Fourth Street and thither the crowd of mad revellers followed her. There was a breathing spell during the

summer but the frenzy renewed itself, with a fiercer, madder abandon, with the first cool days.

Bruce had just managed to live through the summer. There were many lean days, days when he remained in bed, to husband strength and forget that he was hungry. But the world would not permit him to starve in peace. Always some accident saved him. Once it was a job of typing for a school teacher, once it was a bit of translating, once it was a poker game in which luck smiled upon him and in one night poured eighty dollars into his lap.

It was unbelievable. Why had it happened? "Fattening me for the slaughter," he thought.

With the reawakening of life in New York in the fall, the poker games were renewed, and the play continued to feed him. Late in November, luck turned upon him and stripped him. He had fought off disaster, clinging desperately to his text. It was no use. When full houses and four of a kind betray one, ruin is at hand. The wisest must bow to so relentless a Fate.

His condition, perhaps, was apparent in his face. At any rate one of the young men who worked on *The Clarion* said that there was a place open on that paper and suggested that he go down at once and see the managing editor.

It was a cold, rainy evening. Bruce had no overcoat. His had been taken by some one who, perhaps, needed it more than Bruce did. He went down on the subway, got out at Park Row and walked toward Pearl Street. He was not familiar with the section east of Park Row and at last found himself far below the *Clarion* office with a long walk back through the rain.

When he finally reached the building and climbed the stairs to the second floor he was wet and cold and bedraggled. At best his clothes were barely passable; in his present condition he looked like a tramp—and a not very prepossessing tramp. He stood at the high counter that extended across one end of the room waiting for the managing editor. His clothes dripped water, a stream ran off the hat he held in his hand, his face was white and his cheeks sunken. In spite of his plight he was indifferent to the result of the impending interview. He had come because he had promised.

The editor appeared. He was a small man with large eyes, quick and decisive in his movements.

"I understand you have a place for a newspaper man. Can you give me a trial?" Bruce said.

Plainly the managing editor was staggered. "Why, no, there is no vacancy at present. If you care to leave your name and——"

"No, thank you. I understood you wanted a man now. I should have no interest in anything in the future."

He went out, holding his worn coat close against the rain and the wind. He was half-relieved at the refusal. It was so long since he had worked that he doubted his ability to keep regular hours, to do any kind of newspaper work satisfactorily. These reflections only mildly interested him. The main occupation of life at present was waiting.

Back at Polly's he found comparative warmth and companions ready to welcome him. They were talking of a poker game when he entered, but they could not organize it

without him.

"Come on, Bruce, how about a little poker?"

"Go ahead if you like. It's no use playing with me. I've only got two dollars." He took off his coat and hung it in front of the oven. They played in the kitchen, out of the way of those who came into the front room to spend their money and enjoy themselves. Those who played poker were a select band who were not expected to contribute largely to the running expenses of the restaurant.

"You're credit's good."

"Not in poker, it ain't," he answered grimly.

"I'll stake you, I'll stake you. How much you want?" Arthur, a little Russian Jew, asked excitedly.

"None of your money, Artie. I'll play my two dollars, if the boys don't kick, and quit."

"You had the bad luck lately? So me. Seven times I am playing and seven times I am losing. What hell!" said Arthur.

They all laughed. "Artie's proud of the fact that he learned English on the boat coming to America," Allen Newton said.

"Sounds like it," Bruce said dryly.

"You fish," said Artie, "you poor gefilltefisch."

"Come on, Bruce. Every minute is costing me money."

They dragged out the table, they scurried around after chairs—they were elated, excited, eager. It was as though each was sure of winning a fortune and begrudged the minutes that stood between him and wealth. They sat down, six of them: Artie and Allen, and Bill Spangler, and Jack Rucker, and Teas Weldon, and Bruce.

Bruce banked—he always banked. As he started counting out the chips, Artie began to shout, "What limit, what limit? Come on, you fishes, put now a limit on it. What?"

"Shut up, Artie," Bruce said. "You make enough noise for all the Russian Jews in the world. We'll start her at fifty cents, eh? You can boost her if you like after I'm cleaned."

"Hear him once," cried Artie. "When was you cleaned, tell me, tell me."

"Won't someone throw a chair at that little yid?" asked Weldon, who was himself a hunchback and a mere morsel of a suffering man.

They had forgotten the cards. They shouted for them now and a deck was brought. "Give me the papers," said Jack. "I'll shuffle while Bruce finishes with the chips. Don't forget to rake for these."

The chips were out, two dollars worth to each man, and the first hand was dealt. They confined themselves to jackpots as a safer and more conservative game than straight poker. Artie won the first pot.

"Watch your step, Jew. You know what it means to win the first pot."

"Jealous dogs! Any pot is good for this little Jew."

The game proceeded. Bruce husbanded his slim resources, waiting, waiting. He that endureth unto the end—

"Chuckle, chuckle," cried Artie.

"That's Russian yiddish for 'I pass,' " Teas explained. He sat on Arthur's right and

had dealt.

"I open," said Bruce, on Artie's left.

"Let's keep the pikers out," said Allen, doubling the bet.

"Can't keep me out with two miserable little pair," said Spangler.

"I raise," said Jack Rucker.

Artie began to shout, "What does it cost me? How much, how much?"

"For God's sake wait 'till it's your turn," Bruce said. "What do you do, Teas?"

"What do you think I do? What would you do if you had a pair of sevens and two raises ahead of you? So do I."

"Now, Artie?"

Artie's eyes were bulging from his head. "What does it cost me? How much?"

"A dollar and a half."

"I make it two."

"You do, eh? What in hell did that double chuckle mean the first time round?"

"Two dollars. It's up to you, Bruce. Two dollars it cost you."

"It does not. A dollar and a half is what it costs me. You must have learned mathematics when you were getting your English."

"What you do, Newton? Wake Newton up, Bill. Speak, What?"

"Oh, these are no good," said Newton, throwing his cards away.

"I stay," said Spangler, but his hand shook as he put in his chips.

"Once Shaky Bill's in, he sticks," said Weldon.

"Sure. Why not. I got a good chance."

"I raise," said Jack.

"Fifty and fifty," shouted Artie.

"Never saw a man so eager to get rid of his money in my life," said Bruce. "Now just for that I raise."

"These wouldn't be any good if I made them," Bill said and with a violent gesture, as though he had been personally affronted, he shoved his hand into the discards.

Rucker hesitated. "I don't think Bruce's raise means anything, but you can't tell about Artie. He might have something and not have seen it the first time. I'll stay."

"Come once more," Artie cried excitedly.

"What you trying to do? Drive everybody out? You can't expect to get rid of Jack and me and it's foolish to make us both paupers on one hand. All right, have it your own way. I'll raise," Bruce said.

"Stay," said Jack.

Artie laughed nervously. " 'Nough. Give me one card."

"Do you suppose the little bum had four of a kind pat?" Bruce mused. "I wouldn't put it past him."

"More than two-thirds likely," said Teas. "He's just the kind would draw one card to fours—so as to make it easy for his friends."

“Can’t help it. I’ll play these,” said Bruce.

“Give me two,” said Jack.

“What yo’ do?” Artie demanded. “What you do? You opened it.”

“I know that,” Bruce answered. “If you had anything to think with, you’d know it’s just as well to do a little thinking now and then. I guess I’ll bet fifty cents.”

“You know you’ll bet fifty cents,” said Teas.

“Call it,” said Jack.

“That’s a relief,” said Bruce. “If Jack had bettered he’d have raised.”

“I raise,” cried Artie.

“Listen, yid. Mine enemy is delivered into my hand. I raise.”

“I probably got the best hand at that. I can’t call. Pass,” said Jack.

“What you got?” said Artie throwing in fifty cents.

“A little full—three nines and a pair of ladies. Any good?”

“You win. Take in your pot, take in your pot.”

“What did you have, Artie?” Bill demanded, but Artie laughed and slipped his cards into the pack.

“I’ll tell the screamin’ world that’s some pot,” said Teas.

“Nearly twenty dollars,” said Jack.

“Don’t be silly,” laughed Allen. “There wasn’t over ten dollars.”

“What did you have, Jack?” Bruce asked.

“Only three aces.”

“Too bad. That’s the kind of luck I had all last week. If you want to know, Allen, there was twenty, seventy-five in the pot.”

“That makes a round of rudles,” said Bill.

Teas objected. “Don’t see why you fellows are always tryin’ to boost the limit. Can’t you lose your money fast enough at fifty cents a throw?”

“Always play rudles,” said Artie.

“Sure you do, and somebody goes broke, and can’t pay.”

“I always pay,” shouted Artie. “When was I ever playing and not paying?”

“Oh, dill the cards, dill the cards,” said Spangler.

“Why don’t somebody dill?” asked Artie.

“It’s your deal, funny face,” said Teas, “but don’t hurry on my account if you’re goin’ to play dollar limit. I got a lot of things to do with my money besides giving it to you vultures.”

Of course they played the round of rudles and as there were two more full houses during the round, the game never got back to the fifty cent limit.

Bruce’s bad luck was broken. He had endured. Like Job he had been saved with the skin of his teeth.

At three o’clock, Jack quit, twenty-five dollars loser. The remaining five played on until after seven in the morning. When the game broke up, Bruce was nearly a hundred dollars winner, and sixty-five of it he received in cash. Cold and unshaved and dispirited,

he and Artie and Bill went to the Brevoort for breakfast. Bruce, the pauper of the night before, bought the meal for his friends.

In spite of the unseemly hour, they had cocktails and were noisy. Any company of which Artie was a member was noisy. They talked of the game, of the big pot Bruce had won and they got from Artie the admission that he had held only two pairs in that play and had been trying to bluff a full house and three aces. “You picked a fine time,” said Bill.

Bruce was not listening. At a neighboring table sat a girl with a slightly tilted nose, golden-brown hair and serious gray eyes. She ate in quiet indifference to the boisterous trio at her elbow. Artie began a story, slightly off-color.

“Shut up,” said Bruce. “There’s a girl behind you.”

Artie looked over his shoulder. “Don’t know her.”

“Neither do I.”

“All right, then. As I was saying——”

“Damn it, soft pedal it, can’t you?” When Bruce spoke in that tone, attention was paid to him. Artie sat with his mouth hanging open and stared. Bruce flushed crimson, quickly contrite. “Sorry. But there’s no use insulting her, just because she happens to be alone. Oh, hell, let’s get out of here. A little sleep won’t do us any harm.”

IV

THAT night Bruce had dinner at Petitpas, sitting, as he invariably did, at Mr. Yeats' left. He was not, even then, the glass of fashion, but he looked respectable. He had not dined with the French sisters for some time, not, indeed, since he had taken a room on Bank Street, which was cheaper and nearer the village. The clientele of the place had changed slightly. Many of the distinguished people who had frequented it, had found new interests—the glamour of Mr. Yeats' name no longer being sufficient to hold them. He was getting to be an old man, a very old man. The vivacity that had characterized him when he and Bruce first met was gone, or subdued, but his mind was still youthful and his talk was that of a philosopher.

"The trouble with Americans—are ye listening, Darton?"

"Yes, Mr. Yeats."

"The trouble with Americans—another bottle, Mademoiselle."

Celestine, in a spirit of roguery, spoke to him in rapid French.

He turned his head sidewise, listening, while his eyes laughed. "What did she say, Darton?"

"She said, 'Certainly. Mr. Yeats may have all the wine he can possibly drink.' "

"Did she? I'm convinced the English speak better French than the French. I can understand an Englishman's French, but a Frenchman——"

"You were going to say something about Americans."

"Ah, yes. The trouble with you Americans is you have no aristocracy. Think of that now. If you had an aristocracy, you would have a standard, a guide. You could tell what was the right thing to do by watching your betters. You would then learn that haste is unbecoming, that to take yourself too seriously is undignified. You would discover that it is not what you do but how you do it, that matters most. The vulgar person is always a boor. An aristocracy would teach you to make your sins attractive. Now they are—ah—simply vulgar, just sins. You could develop a leisure class, and a leisure class would mean art and poetry and philosophy—three things without which no nation can be great. Is that true, now? Americans are accused of being money mad. They are no worse in that respect than other peoples and not so bad as some. But as they have no leisure class they have no relief. Or, as we artists would say, the chioscura is bad. What makes a picture? Light and shadow and color. America has the color but it's all one tone, and that's why Europeans don't understand you. Are ye listening, Darton?"

"Sorry, Mr. Yeats, no. . . . Here's a lady who wants to speak to you."

The girl whom Bruce had seen that morning at the Brevoort, the girl with the golden-brown hair and gray eyes, was standing at Mr. Yeats' elbow. The old gentleman turned his head slowly, then a quick smile of welcome lighted his face and he rose grandly to his great height and shook hands with the caller.

"Won't you sit down? Have yo' had dinner?"

"Yes," said the girl and her voice, full of the joy of living, rang a bell in Bruce's soul.

“I just ran in to see you for a moment. I wanted to come to dinner, but at the last minute I couldn’t. I’m going back to Boston tonight.”

She sat down. Bruce stirred to reseat himself. The movement attracted Mr. Yeats’ attention.

“Ah, yes, Miss Bursell, this is Mr. Darton—ah—one of these wild men from the West. I have never seen your West, but Darton shows me what it’s like.”

Bruce sat down. He watched the play of light across the girl’s face, he saw the tenderness come and go in her eyes as she looked at her aged friend. She was a daughter sitting at the feet of an adored father; she was a novitiate in the world of art paying homage to a Master. Something that was dead, moved and lived in Bruce. A vanished, strangled sensation stirred again. It was madness creeping towards the surface. That way lay fever and a fearful unrest. By an act of will he destroyed the fine harmony that was beginning to swell within him. He threw over it the discord of savage thoughts.

They talked those two, youth and age, Mr. Yeats leaning forward, his head turned slightly aside, absorbing each word she uttered.

Disgust and self-abhorrence smote Bruce. He rose abruptly.

“I shall have to go. Good-night, Miss Bursell.”

The girl raised her eyes and in their depths he saw reproach and a flickering light that was baffling.

“Ah, Darton, for God’s sake, you’re always rushing away. These Americans, Miss Bursell, can never relax—they have no faculty for quiet conversation. Darton, here, will hurry somewhere so he can hurry somewhere else, instead of sitting still and listening to talk that would improve his mind.”

Bruce laid a reverent, affectionate hand on the old man’s shoulder. “That’s what I’m afraid of. I don’t want to improve my mind. Good-night, Mr. Yeats. I’ll come in again soon.”

“Ah, yes; well, you’ll only hurry away without stopping to talk. Why don’t you come back here and take a room? We had fine times when you were living here. Ah, well, good-night.”

Bruce went out. He turned south on Eighth Avenue and walked fiercely homeward. He was in a turmoil. He had been dead and was alive—the resurrection was agony. He had lain warm in his cerements: they were rent from him. A pair of gray eyes had looked at him reproachfully. He shuddered, driving his knuckles against his lids to shut out the sight.

In the quiet of his own room, he rested. He took this new emotion and held it before him for critical inspection. It was no more than an emotion; its substance was air, it was formless, fleeting, a breath of vapor. He tossed it aside. He had again triumphed over his soul.

V

IN the fall of 1916 the world frenzy was at its height. The long line of trenches sweeping across France and Belgium marked the curve of the nations' insanity. Russia was driving to a violent change. France, in the phrase then current, was "bled white." England was at the point of prostration, she was impressing her old men; the fiasco of the Peninsular campaign had been consummated. What was the condition in Germany? No one knew. She maintained her line with great strength and was said to be preparing for a mighty offensive movement. In America the war spirit grew steadily. Wilson, whose managers ran him for re-election on the slogan "He kept us out of war," was returned to office by the narrowest possible margin. Notes, the trend of which was obvious to the observant, were being exchanged with Germany. The United States was booming along towards the cataclysm.

Through the midst of this fever and convulsion, Bruce moved indifferently—it could not touch him, it was not part of the universe he had created for himself. He saw men go into the tumult, vanishing into Canada or the Foreign Legion. He heard war, war, war talked around him. He shrugged it aside. He was powerless to stem the advancing mania but he could keep himself clear of its ravages.

During the past year he had lived precariously, clinging to the fickle goddess, Luck. At no time had she wholly abandoned him—and he had survived. For what purpose? He saw none. Better men were snuffed out, fell in the trenches or yielded to the breath of the flu—men full of high resolve and talent. Possessing neither of these qualities, he lived. He became an enigma to himself. He was interested and watched his progress with a calm eye.

In December his good luck left him. In something more subtle than his mind he felt this change of fortune and he studied to beat it. He refrained from play, but his money disappeared. He returned to the game—and lost. He fought the cards with cool determination. Luck laughed at his puny efforts. She had wearied of bestowing her favors upon a worthless worshipper. Now, turning upon him in a savage mood, she stripped him.

So ended his meaningless fight. He had struggled without design: he faced disaster without regret.

In this moment, emptied of hope and resources, he did not despair. It was astonishing. In the midst of prosperity he had planned his own death; in abject poverty, he determined to live. He who had crushed out sentiment was kept alive by the look of reproach in a pair of gray eyes. Why? He had seen them twice; they were gone forever. No bell sounded within him. She had come, signalled him briefly, vaguely, and driven on into the unknown. She was only a flash in darkness. It was enough. He determined to live.

A bitter north wind whipped him as he turned south on Greenwich Avenue. A thin fall overcoat gave him slight protection against that blast. He hurried before it, seeking the warmth that was to be found at Polly's. His clothes were in rags, yet he wore them with an air. His face was thin and gray, yet he looked out with a clear intelligent eye, and not even adversity could make him commonplace.

It was past the luncheon hour, and Polly's was deserted. Bruce took advantage of his credit and ate. Polly came to sit at the table with him and a little later Ellen May Worthing joined them. Mrs. Worthing was a writer, struggling towards recognition, not then the national favorite she is today. She was going to have a baby and that interfered with her work. She complained of this and there was a slight whine in her voice. Bruce had never met her and Polly did not now introduce them.

"I've got to make money," Mrs. Worthing said. "I can't keep my house going without it. It's terrible—the way prices are going up. If I could get a secretary—but I can't afford that. Still I'm going to try. I ought to be able to get a girl for part time without turning over my bank account to her. Do you know of any one, Polly?"

"Not just now. I suppose you want her right away."

"Yes. You've no idea the expense I'm under. And if I stop work, the income stops."

Bruce studied her. She was very dark, with a weak, vain mouth, but with good eyes and forehead. There was an unpleasant twang in her voice but he guessed that came from an indulgence in self-pity.

Polly was called away, and Mrs. Worthing preened herself, ignoring Bruce and frankly applying lipstick and powder. He watched her and went hot and cold; he choked over his food. He was swallowing a bitter draught.

Polly did not return. Mrs. Worthing was preparing to leave. He was at the last gasp. An instant more—she rose, gathering her fur coat about her. It was now or never.

"Mrs. Worthing?"

"Yes?" she tossed him the word insolently over her shoulder. She was being the great woman in the presence of a mendicant.

"I can do typewriting. Do you think I could do your work?"

She turned to look fully at him. "Who are you?"

"Bruce Darton. A good many people in the Village know me."

She became kindly, throwing aside the haughty pose. "I don't know. I should think you could do the work nicely. But you heard what I said: I can't pay much."

"That doesn't matter. You'll pay something. And it's only part time."

"Yes, but I should never have dreamed of offering it to you, Mr. Darton."

"That would have been my misfortune."

"Really? Do you know what I had thought of offering as salary? You'll be astonished. Six dollars a week."

"And what hours?"

"Oh, I couldn't expect much of your time for that and I don't get up very early. Say, ten to one."

"And you'll want me to begin——"

"Could you come Monday?"

"Certainly. Monday at ten. Thank you very much, Mrs. Worthing."

She went out. Bruce sat down. His face was covered with sweat but his mind sang. He had taken a place among the honest bread-earners. He smiled. It certainly would be no more than bread—or not so much. It was something, he was set on the right road, he

would no longer be a cheap gambler.

Six dollars a week. The sum loomed large in his eyes, yet its proportions were desperate. Early in 1917, war prices had not yet become devastating. Bruce paid three dollars a week for his room, a hall bedroom on Bank Street. He could get dinner at Polly's for thirty-five or forty cents. He could lunch sumptuously at the Automat for fifteen cents. Six dollars a week! It could be made to do—if he had clothes. Why borrow trouble? Those he had on would last, how long? He must remember not to turn his back to any one who was in the same room with him. That would be fatal. The seat of his trousers had, practically, laid aside all responsibility. But for that they were perfectly good trousers—and he could sit down most of the time.

That night he again dined at Polly's and Bill Spangler got him on the 'phone.

"Want a job, Bruce," he asked.

"You said it."

"Can you read copy?"

"You know. I've done everything around a newspaper, but it's a long time since I worked."

"Want a job on *The Clarion*?"

"I don't care what it's on just so it's a job."

"Come on down and go to work, then."

"What? now?"

"Yes. And hurry, Bruce. You know where the office is."

"You bet I do. I found it—once."

Again Bruce stood within *The Clarion* office. This time it was unnecessary to see the Managing Editor. Spangler was City Editor and he gave Bruce a place at the copy desk at a salary of seventeen dollars a week. Bruce took off his thin overcoat and sat down. A sigh of satisfaction escaped him. At last he had won home. For three years and a half he had wandered in the Wilderness, beset of great temptations, dragged at and buffeted, pursued by imps of hell, scourged by devils, caught up by whirlwinds, left in solitudes that were maddening, abandoned in noisome places, swallowed up in roaring vortices—bruised and crushed and grinded by the inexorable mills into whose hopper goes nothing but grist. He had escaped. Through no talent of his own, in the face of justice and the laws of nature, he had escaped. For what purpose? For the perfection of what design? He was overwhelmed by the incomprehensible miracle of his salvation.

VI

IMPORTANT changes were imminent on *The Clarion*. The Editor was going out and a new man was coming in. Spangler would go out with the old regime and Beresford was to take his place as City Editor. There was apprehension among the other members of the staff but this proved groundless.

Bruce fought doggedly through the first few nights. With assistance he held on until the old knowledge, half forgotten through disuse, returned to him. In this struggle Francis Silversteen helped most. Silversteen was a Jew, slight of stature and short, with a big head, a big nose and deep-set eyes hidden by shell-rimmed glasses. He had a protective bitterness of speech, for he was the most sensitive of men. He was talented to the point of genius and burdened with the intense individuality of the original thinker. From the first night he and Bruce were friends and Francis watched over his work with the critical eye of a kind mother.

"I saw you once before," Francis said at a moment of leisure.

"Yes? When? I don't remember."

"After a thirty-hour poker session. I walked in on you. Had to see Bill. It was the day I started work here. You were a ghastly looking crew—unshaved, unfed and breathing tobacco smoke for air. You glared at me, as much as to say, 'What in God's name are you doing here?' "

"Don't remember it. There have been too many of those sessions in the last couple of years for any one of them to stand out much. I remember seeing you last fall, once. Some one told me you had written a play, or the girl you were with had written a play, and sold it. I know I wondered at the time what in hell it was that made any one want to write a play."

"The girl had written it. Harris took it. I don't know whether he's going to produce it . . . Wouldn't you like to write a play?"

Bruce laughed. "Not in a thousand years. And yet the funny part is I drank all of that home-brewed wine—once. A long time ago."

"You sound like an ancient. You aren't so old."

"Good men have died younger."

After the paper had been put to bed they went to Child's and sat for hours drinking coffee and letting each other see what manner of man each was. They were satisfied and a friendship lasting out the years was formed between them.

Beresford took Spangler's place and Bruce was secure in his job—the new editor liked him.

Every day, all through the winter, Bruce went regularly to Ellen May Worthing's home and did her typing. He would gladly have escaped that drudgery but he had given his word. She discussed her stories with him, but it was hard to be interested, he could discover so little verve or originality. Mrs. Worthing obviously was not at her best and many of the stories written that winter will have no place in this popular author's collected

works. Late in March she was obliged to discontinue work and Bruce was freed of that obligation.

Affairs in the mad world were rushing to the inevitable. England and France were crying to America for money and men. The storm had burst in Russia and the rulers of the earth looked about in dismay.

"America is going in." "America will keep out." "Wilson is pledged." "Yes, but on which side?" "The Monroe Doctrine——" "To hell with that. They are shaking the money bags." "That's just it. There's more money in keeping out. What do you think, Bruce?"

"We're damned fools enough to do anything. If it were left to the people——"

"Talk sense. The people won't get a shot at it."

"No, they'll get shot at."

The bodeful evening in April came. Wilson delivered his great speech, and Congress obediently voted America and her resources into the holocaust.

For the first time Bruce considered seriously his relation to this war. It had been raging around him for nearly three years but he had shut his eyes and stopped his ears, ostrich-like hiding his head from the tempest. In the abstract he was opposed to war, but this was no longer an abstract problem. It had been brought home and was lying hideously at his feet. He reviewed the situation; he contemplated the struggle in its inception and in its progress; he pondered the outcome; he tried to isolate the possible benefits; he considered himself judicious and cool: he was, in fact, but the son of his father and he found himself unalterably opposed to war.

But America had entered the war and he was an American. What did that mean? That he must follow, blindly, a mob instinct? That he must set patriotism above humanity? That he must badger himself into a murderous quarrel with men against whom he had no ill-will? That, with the statement dictated by the President, he ceased to be a man, an entity, and became a machine, a violent destructive machine? That was nonsense. Such a metamorphosis could not be effected by any one man or clique of men.

There was no power that could rob him of his right to think. He insisted on thinking and his thought told him that war was an evil, an inexcusable and desperate evil, forcing its ugly head out of an evil past into the light of a day that should be good. So for himself he decided, but he held his peace. "It is a question between each man and his conscience," he thought.

The draft came and the radical circles in New York were thrown into chaos. The German socialists, for the most part, had bent to the will of the masses and had voiced no opposition to the war lords. Would the same thing occur in America? Some of the leading socialists had already broken with the party and were filling the air with jingo speeches—patting themselves on the back as one hundred per cent Americans. The party met in convention at St. Louis and adopted a program opposed to the war. From that instant all members, all red-card men, became suspect. The strain proved too great; more of the leaders abandoned the organization.

In New York there were ragings and violent oaths and secret meetings and extra-legal organizations. Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors made themselves heard. Young men and boys, some of them terrified, many of them honest, appealed to Bruce for advice. He said to each one:

"You will have to decide this matter for yourself. It's entirely up to you. I'm past the age limit and have no right to counsel you. If I were you I should pay no attention to anything the graybeards say. A man who is too old to fight has no business to express an opinion about war. On either side. That goes for the Pacifists as well as for the old chaps at the Union League Club. All they can do is prate. It's not they who are going out to be shot or huddled into Leavenworth. Make up your mind, or talk it over with other young men."

Registration day came and passed—peacefully. The draft followed and there was no outburst such as had stained New York's streets with blood during the Civil War.

Having come out of the Wilderness, Bruce felt the sun of prosperity beginning to shine upon him. Beresford was leaving to go into business for himself and the city editorship was offered to Bruce. That meant a salary of thirty-two dollars a week. Munificence!

What, then, was his state of mind? He was no longer a boy. He had lost the seriousness of youth and had surfeited himself with days of idleness. He was at work. He had changed his rags for decent apparel; he went with money in his pocket, his own money, not the cheap offerings tossed into his lap by Luck. Yet his mental attitude remained unchanged. He faced vacuity. He looked out upon hysteria and it sickened him; upon the work in hand and it was drudgery. He was alone and glad. He found nothing worth a supreme effort or exaltation. He was master of his emotions—love was dead in him—and he rejoiced. In that mood he viewed his associates with tolerance, pitying the weakness that made them the prey to their emotions. Upon Francis he looked most kindly and to him only did he unseal his lips.

They sat one morning at breakfast and the mantle of depression enveloped Silversteen.

"It's hell, Bruce, the things a man has to go through. My wife is suing me for divorce."

"And that knocks you all in a heap?"

"No, it isn't that. It's my son, Bruce. You won't understand that, won't know what it means. I can't give him up. I can stop the divorce, but that wouldn't be fair to her. God, I don't know what to do."

"You can't get the boy out of your mind?"

"Of course not. Could you? Just think, your own son." Unheeding he turned the knife in an old wound, but his victim remained unmoved, a stoic looking into the eyes of an ancient tragedy.

"Listen, Frank. Maybe you can use what I tell you. I have a wife and kid out West. I did have. I was mad about Jack, the kid. The time came when I saw it would be necessary to leave him. I took that—love, that passion, and strangled it. I put him out of my life. I did it deliberately, in cold blood. It can be done."

"Good God."

"If this helps you, I'll be glad. I don't know any one else to whom I'd tell it. You're the only one in the world that knows this. Most people get fat on their emotions. You're different. They consume you. Get hold of them. If it's necessary to part with this woman and her child, part with them, completely, finally. The hard thing is to make up your mind to do it. The rest is easy."

"You put him out of your life?"

"Yes. And I put out other things. I fought for control and I got it, to some extent at least. It's dangerous to permit yourself to grow too fond of any one. That means chains. Besides, there are so many things can happen. Death, for instance. If your son died, as you feel at present, it would raise hell with you. You haven't any right to let yourself drift into that state. It's easy enough to check a passion if you catch it early."

"I won't forget this, Bruce. I have a feeling you've helped me a lot."

Bruce gave out, thus, to his friend the fruit of his bitter experience. He told honestly the belief that was in him. If you catch a love early—but how early? Fate, so far, had been merely toying with him. Now she snipped the hair that the terrible sharp sword might descend. It was as though she had paused, simply that he might have an opportunity to unburden himself to Francis, before delivering the final blow.

There was scarcely a breathing spell in the swift passing from sage to slave. That night he looked for the third time into a pair of serious gray eyes. There was the well-remembered, slightly tilted nose, the golden-brown hair, the competent, full-lipped mouth. She had not forgotten and she gave him a slim, strong hand and a grasp of comradeship. She was seated at Mr. Yeats' right and Bruce faced her.

By what a narrow margin had he been guided to dine at Petitpas that evening. It was his night off and he would, naturally, have spent the evening with friends in the Village. It was, probably, his talk with Francis that set him hungering for a sight of the one man in New York whom he held in affectionate reverence. If he had missed. . . . His debt to Francis was great. So early he was willing to admit that.

Mr. Yeats was growing feeble. He was bowing under the burden of four score years. During the winter he had been seriously sick; his face was still thin and a troublesome cough clung to him, but the joy in good listeners abided with him and he talked.

"Have you read *The Way of all Flesh*, Darton?"

"Yes, Mr. Yeats."

"Did you like it?"

"Certainly. Do you?"

"It's a grand book, Miss Bursell. If you haven't read it, read it. I've a copy upstairs, I'll get for you."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Yeats. I couldn't bother you. I'll get it from the library."

The little far away silver bells were set ringing.

"Ah, yes. I knew Sam Butler well. Are you listenin', Darton?"

"When did I ever miss a word, Mr. Yeats?"

"His studio adjoined mine in London. A big red-haired man he was. I remember it was he who told me of Browning. I'd been out of my studio one morning, painting some damned Lady Something or other and when I got back, Butler said, 'Who do you think was here, Yeats?' Ah, well, I couldn't guess. Browning had been there. Rosetti had told him of one of my pictures and Browning had come around to have a look at it. What do you think of that, eh?"

"And you never met Browning?" breathed Miss Bursell.

"Ah, no. He died soon after, poor chap. Swinburne, yes. I remember he came to party where a lot of us were gathered one night and he got into a quarrel with the cabby and a

couple of us went out and paid the man and took Swinburne in. . . .”

A pair of gray eyes and golden-brown hair that waved tenderly, caressingly, over ears and neck, a voice that set bells ringing, a man who had said, “Catch a passion early——” and an old philosopher and artist delving into a misty past—of such is the substance of paradise.

The dinner was over, the piano tinkled, the guests of the Mademoiselle Petitpas danced or went out into the night seeking other places of amusement. The long table was deserted but for the trio at its head. Celestine of the burnished black hair busied herself removing the débris. The night was hot and still. The cultured voice, grown slightly husky with age and use, went on reading from the pages of a man’s life. The dancers came back to the garden, their faces red and wet but laughing. They sat down to fan themselves vigorously, to order iced drinks, to catch their breath before hurling themselves back into the fury of another two-step.

Mr. Yeats smoked a vile cigar and—talked. He stroked, fondly, the empty bottle that had held red wine and, when Celestine drew near, he interrupted himself to say, “Ah, another bottle, Mademoiselle.”

“Yes, Mester Yeats.”

The bottle arrived. He uncorked it, poured a meager portion into his glass, sipped it and—talked.

There was an uproar of mirth from an adjoining table. Mr. Yeats interrupted himself to watch, with twinkling eyes, the boisterous young people.

“Ah, Americans are great salesmen,” said the Sage. “They even sell themselves their own laughter.”

“Let me tell you a story,” Bruce said. He told the story of two Jews each proud of his son’s ability as a salesman. The old man listened, his tongue in the corner of his mouth, his face set for a laugh. He leaned close, not to miss a word, his hand cupped behind his ear. At the denouement, he threw back his head and laughed like a boy. It was refreshing—it was tragic. Miss Bursell laughed, too, but her eyes were on Mr. Yeats, and the lids were heavy with tears.

The dancers wearied of exhausting themselves and went away. Josephine snapped off the piano. The place was still. Bruce looked at Miss Bursell. The old voice was only a murmur in his ears, meaningless but comforting. When it ceased she would go away. Disappear into that region of which he knew nothing, mingle with people of whom he had never heard, sail her uncharted seas and, by the law of averages, never again cross his bows. He refused to accept this logical conclusion. He would smash Fate to prevent it.

Mr. Yeats was growing weary of much talking. He leaned back in his chair, smoking the poor remnant of his cigar, leaving his wine undrunk in his glass.

The girl leaned forward and laid her young, smooth, firm hand on his, old and wrinkled. “You’re getting tired, Mr. Yeats. We’ve imposed on you.” Bruce flushed at the collective pronoun. “It’s terribly late.” She rose. Bruce rose. With difficulty Mr. Yeats got to his feet. They went out through the pantry, telling the sisters *bon soir*, passed through the kitchen and into the room that gave onto the street.

The patriarch stood at the foot of the stairs and looked at them. “Ah, well, good-night. You’ll be here tomorrow? Darton, when are you coming again?”

“Not for a week, Mr. Yeats. I only have one night a week.”

“Why don’t you give up that damned job? Ah, well, come when you can.” He turned and started slowly, painfully, up the stairs, climbing towards the third floor and a room peopled with his books, his manuscripts and his pictures, a room, Bruce knew, in disorder, in vast confusion, with windows hermetically closed to keep out the heat and the mosquitoes. He went alone, but he was companioned by the great men and women of the past fifty years. Their arms were around him, their voices were in his ears—they were guiding their friend and Master home.

Miss Bursell had lingered. When Mr. Yeats disappeared, Bruce turned to her.

“Can I put you on a car, Miss Bursell.”

“Yes. No. I don’t know. If it weren’t so hot, I’d walk.”

He held open the iron gate and she preceded him into the street. Together they walked toward Eighth Avenue.

“It is hot,” Bruce said. “It’ll be worse inside. Would you—I know so little about you, it’s hard to suggest.”

“What were you going to say?”

“Any way we could get a breath of air—on a Fifth Avenue bus.”

“Splendid. It’s the very thing I wanted to do.”

At the Pennsylvania Station, they climbed to the top of a Riverside bus which carried them across Thirty-second Street and onto the world’s greatest thoroughfare. In the summer of 1917 no traffic towers disfigured Fifth Avenue. The long, straight, wide street, with gleaming asphalt and sensuous undulations stretched endlessly before them. Bruce was silent. The girl took off her hat and held it in her lap and chattered, speaking of inconsequential things, with a garrulity born of nervous excitement.

Bruce listened to the little silver bells and was content.

As the bus swung around into Fifty-seventh Street they were thrown against each other and their knees touched. Bruce was no longer a boy. He had been married and was learned of women. He was cold and had crushed love. A friend had said of him once, “You have all the sentiment of a block of ice.” Bruce had believed it—and had been flattered. This cynic, this man without emotion, this creature greater than Love, trembled and was thrown into a panic by the accidental contact of his knee against the knee of a girl.

Lazarus was being called out of the tomb and the resurrection was more frightful than the demise.

From their elevation they could look down into a street through which limousines whirled ladies in white and gentlemen in black and roadsters raced, each carrying a man and a girl; even shabby Fords panted along with a man at the wheel and a girl sitting close to him. Along the pavement, couples strolled, their arms intertwined, careless of their gaping neighbors. High over all was a clear, full moon—beneficent, kindly, serene.

They came to Riverside Drive and the shadowed Hudson was below them, dark, mighty, moving majestically on its way. Out from Grant’s tomb, warships rode at anchor and their lights were caught up and multiplied a thousand fold by the rippling water.

The two rode on. War and the conflicts of men, death and wounds and disease, the tragedies of broken hearts and shattered lives, of weeping mothers and lost sons were not

in their world. They were part of the “huge and thoughtful night,” the tender, enveloping, soft night, the high moon and the dancing lights and the deep, wise river.

Miss Bursell’s chatter had died away. The breath of romance fanned her. She resisted it and turned to her companion.

“You know, you look much better tonight—I mean healthier—than when I saw you first.”

“Doubtless. I had just come from an all-night poker party.”

“And had you won?”

“Fortunately. It was a close shave.”

“I was thinking specially of that night, at Petitpas.”

“I should have been all right then. I had slept all day.”

“No, you were awfully white.”

“Why do you remember these silly details?”

“For one thing, because you left so abruptly. I wasn’t just used to that.”

“Sorry. That’s my way. When I decide to go, I go. Can’t help it.”

“Mr. Yeats said some wonderful things about you that night. That’s another reason I remember.”

“Mr. Yeats is kind, but he’s a bad judge of his friends. I shouldn’t put much confidence in what he says about any one he likes.”

“He said one thing about you, I’ve never forgotten. I don’t know whether it’s complimentary or not. I’m sure he meant it to be. He said, ‘If Darton were to die, his epitaph would be, “We could easier have spared a better man.” ’ ”

“A better man wouldn’t be hard to find.”

“Do you expect me to contradict that?”

“No. It’s merely a statement of fact.”

“Because if you do, I won’t. I have a feeling it’s true.”

“You can’t quarrel with me about that.”

“Oh, I’m not trying to quarrel. But I’m honest. You’ll find that out.”

“Then I’m to see you again?”

“Aren’t you?—Tell me about your work. You’re a newspaper man.”

“Tell me about you and where I can see you and when.”

“Oh, me! There isn’t anything to tell about me.”

Nevertheless he won from her the skeleton of an outline of her life. She had been born in Mississippi, educated in Boston, studied music in Vienna, lived, briefly, in Berlin, Paris, London and had come to New York to fight her way into the world of music. She was a pianist. There was a shadowy father in the South, a less shadowy mother in Boston and she herself alone in New York.

“I can’t do the things I try to do. I try and try, but they won’t come right. There’s something.—Do you suppose a woman can’t do them? Why should a man be a better pianist than a woman? I’ve thought and thought, but I can’t find an answer. No one can tell me. It isn’t true, or there’s some reason for it. Which is it?”

“Don’t ask me. All I know it, it’s hard to find the names of women among the great artists.”

“I know. And it’s frightfully discouraging.”

“Maybe it’s just masculine meanness. Maybe the men don’t give the women artists a fair chance.”

“That’s nonsense. I’ve heard women say that. It isn’t true. I know by my own experience it isn’t true. I’ve had every chance. If I don’t win, it’s because of something I lack. But I won’t give up. I go on trying.”

They descended from the bus and immediately climbed to the top of another bound for Washington Square.

A touring car, loaded with men in khaki, bore down upon them, making the night hideous with shout and blast of horn. They yelled up at the passengers on the bus and the passengers, men and women, screamed back at them. The car dashed away, leaving a spirit of excitement behind it. Men spoke loudly, approvingly, and women giggled and called them “dears.”

Miss Bursell, with face averted, peered down at the soft bosom of the river.

“Gee, I just love sojers,” said a girl behind Bruce.

“Me, too,” said her girl friend. “What I wouldn’t do for a sojer!” They cackled with laughter at the suggestion.

“They was one spoke to me this evenin’,” said the first girl. “Oh, boy! I was excited. He says, ‘Lo, kid. Where yo’ goin’?’ I says, ‘No place, much.’ He says, ‘Come along o’ me then. What?’ I went and purtty soon we come to lamp post and he stopped to look at a letter or somethin’. And all at oncit he says, ‘Holy smoke! You’re a beaut. Turn that face away, kid, and don’ look round till you count twenty, or as high as yo’ can go. Go ahead now.’ I done it and when I looked ’round he was gone. Can yo’ beat that now?”

The girl at Bruce’s side laughed softly, bubbling into the night. She turned her dancing eyes upon him and hummed, “Men were deceivers, ever.”

The bus turned into Fifth Avenue. Street sprinklers had been busy during their absence. They had spread a matchless carpet of velvet which was shot and torn by long shafts of light that illuminated invisible palaces and great structures not reared by the hand of man.

“Oh,” cried Miss Bursell, catching her breath. “Oh, Bruce, it’s beautiful.”

She had put her hand impetuously on his arm. His fingers closed over it. He was being borne, swiftly, to a great height and he was happy.

“Yes, it is beautiful. I’ve seen it a hundred times and it was never beautiful until now.”

VII

WAR and the spirit of war intensified around Bruce. His friends and acquaintances were disappearing into the army. King, Tucker, Parker, Baker, Wallace, Newton, a score and more from the Village were gone. It was emptied of the old faces; new ones took their places. The Village was blotted out—the Village Bruce had known ceased to exist. Cafés innumerable sprang up; rents were raised; the boom which continues to this day began. Old landmarks were wiped out. Seventh Avenue was cut through, the subway was nearing completion. The tail of bricks was doubled.

One afternoon Francis came to him smiling, but with grim eyes and a heightened color.

"You'll have to get a man in my place, Bruce," he said. "I'm in the army."

"Couldn't wait for the draft, eh? All right. You know best."

"That draft idea didn't appeal to me. Besides, I wanted to go in the Tank Corps. So I signed up." And he added, a little wistfully. "Don't you think it's all right, Bruce?"

"Sure, old man. Go ahead. It's just the experience you need. You'll turn out some great copy when you get back."

"Yes? I hope so."

One by one they were going from him, passing into the army, becoming a unit in that terrible machine. He was depressed, but he was not despondent. It was natural: the fever was in the air they all breathed, it got into their veins; they went mad with the general madness, they yielded to the lust to kill. Not one but expected to bag his Heinies and return, alive, sound. Did Francis? There was something in his eyes, resigned, expectant—the pale image of Fate.

The parades, the shoutings, the enthusiasm of his friends left Bruce unmoved. The speeches of the Minute Men turned his blood to vinegar. Too old to fight, most of them, they were stirring young men to go out and kill and be killed. In his heart he hated them—passionately and long he cursed them.

Why was he immune? He breathed the same air, was a native of the same country, heir to the same traditions, the descendant of fighting ancestors, himself marked with the green eye of the killer; educated as they were, a student of the same books, a graduate of the same schools; he spoke the same language, lived in the same city, mingled with the same men, read the same news: he was elbow to elbow with them in everything—but thought. Why? Was he inoculated by the fierce germ that had moved in his father's blood? Was he mad or was the world mad? If the world was sane he was glad to be mad.

Mad or sane, he would not, voluntarily, take up arms against his fellow men.

Nothing, since America entered the war, had stirred him so profoundly as the enlistment of Francis. The slight, sensitive Jew was never moulded for a soldier—he was not the stuff of which the hardy bayonet drivers were formed. He was a poet. His mind was sensitized to catch shades of thought and emotion too subtle for the comprehension of his slow-witted companions. What effect would the harsh discipline of the army have

upon such a man? He had violated his convictions and he was exposing himself, naked, to the bitter whirlwind. Bruce was impotent to stay the storm, to save his friend, but the encroaching gray went with him for many days.

He found relief at the side of Margarete Bursell. She could still the turbulence, restore harmony to a distracted mind. When with her he could forget and the smiles came to his lips and a lightness to his heart. She was sympathetic without being obtrusive and there was no irritation back of her laughter.

He told her of Francis and his fears.

"Don't hold him on your conscience, Bruce. His salvation lies in following his own plans. He knows, deep in him, just what this experience will do for him. It's not what he expected, it's not what any of us expected. But it's here and we have to face it. It will be a revelation to some of them. Why not to Francis?"

"Of all people in the world, he's the least fit to be a soldier."

"That's the way it seems to you, and I agree. But there must be something, Bruce, that tempted him—or drove him."

"I wonder. Do you suppose he's trying to escape?"

"But it doesn't matter. Led or driven, he gets to the same place in the end. And in any event, he has to go. You can't do anything. What could you possibly do? Very likely, he can't do anything, either."

"That's it. It's inevitable. I've been a damned fool. If a thing's inevitable, it's silly to complain."

"Good. I'm glad you see that."

"I've known that for a long time. Ever since—"

"Ever since what?"

"No matter. But I had that truth driven home."

They had met often since that night when they rode on the Fifth Avenue bus and a delightful intimacy had grown up between them. To Bruce the association was filled with an unspeakable tenderness, a yearning. To look into her eyes was to multiply his sorrows but to find them beautiful; to grow warm in a happiness that pulsed with pain; to edge ecstasy and find it barred with suffering.

He refused to consider her feeling for him. Reflection on his own condition and conduct ended in blackness. He had dethroned Love and it stepped forth a tyrant. He was smitten and he did not cry out. He measured his baseness and was unchanged; his hypocrisy, and still loved. His lips were sealed; he was in the grasp of a great fear. He could never lay his love before this girl but he could never leave her.

They had been dining and they left the table to go upon the floor and dance. Margarete was alive with music—her response was instant, perfect. They danced. The physical contact smote Bruce as a blow. His arms fell powerless at his side. He had not the strength to continue the fox trot. They returned to their table. The girl looked at him with troubled eyes.

"Are you ill, Bruce?"

He remained silent. Beads of perspiration were on his brow. He could still feel her form within the circle of his arm. It was an ecstasy, an agony.

“I don’t understand.” She put her hand on the trembling arm that lay upon the table. He drew it away, quickly, brusquely. “Have I offended you, Bruce?”

“God, no.”

She was startled by his tone, and hurt. She shrank back in her chair, lowered lids hiding the pain in her eyes. She was silent, and Bruce sat like an image of stone.

The evening each had looked forward to was ruined. They ate and after a time they talked but only of this and that, and they spoke in dead voices out of which animation had passed. They finished and they rose to leave the miserable, drab room that had seemed so gay when they entered it. The couple at the adjoining table tittered. “Had a fine bust up, those two,” the man said to his companion. Red sparks flickered in front of Bruce as he turned upon the speaker. Margarete’s voice came to him from a distance.

“Please, Bruce, come with me.”

He left the man unscathed and went out blindly.

In a rage with himself, he walked with Margarete to her apartment. He unlocked the door and stood holding it open for her to enter. She stepped within and paused, raising her serious gray eyes to his face, waiting, begging, for a word of explanation.

He raised his hat. “Good-night, Margarete.”

She could not restrain the cry, “Bruce!”

He looked at her, replaced his hat, and turning from her went down the street—without a backward glance.

What had happened? Nothing, everything. He had been elevated and thrown down. He had been blinded and endowed with sight. He had stood upon Pisgah. Of all men, he was most wretched. It was a natural reaction. He had sown the seed, he was reaping the harvest. He had schooled himself to conquer emotion, to control love. In an instant, on the dance floor, he had realized that restraint was gone, that he was no longer master. He had become a slave. His life belonged to another. He was a dependent. He had determined to be free. In that struggle he had killed his affection for his son, yet the battle was not ended. He had looked into a pair of troubled gray eyes.

Who was this girl? How had she come into his life? What could she matter to him? There was a world full of women. They were all pretty much alike. Why should one woman be more than all the other thousands? It was ridiculous. Men believed there were soul mates, they clung to that illusion. It was part of their vanity. He would not believe that. How could such a thing happen in so hodgepodge a world? It would require infinite delicacy to match, out of the billions, one man and one woman. Who or what could supply that delicacy? Nature? Her work was crude—she could not even be symmetrical. God? A child’s belief.

No, it was purely an illusion. There were conditions. One was ripe for an impression and the impression took form and became fixed, enduring. Then the victim thought, “I have found the one woman in all the world.” The divorce courts were filled with these soul mates. That was the one sure precept for an unhappy marriage.

Cora? There were other things to consider there. Besides, had he not, subconsciously, predetermined on freedom? That in itself was enough to blight his marriage. True, he had never felt towards Cora as he had, just now, felt towards Margarete. That proved nothing. All of this so-called love was alike in nature; it but varied in intensity.

Ellen? How could he tell? He had been a boy at the time—and she had been very beautiful. He was then unschooled, ready to give emotion free rein. He had revelled in it, a fool glad of his chains. A fool then? Hell and perdition, how had he grown up so wise? Was this wisdom—this torture through which he was passing? Had that been folly, that bliss, that abandonment to joy?

He had been happy with Margarete. Was he afraid of happiness? Was there in him some poison that turned peace to strife, joy to pain? This present torment was self-inflicted. To what purpose? To escape. From Margarete? From slavery to her. Did he seek to escape from her or from himself? No matter. He wanted to breathe freely, to be independent, to be himself. The button moulder——!

He had taken a finer love than this—the love of a father—and annihilated it. It had been painful but he had done it. So he would take this and destroy it, he would crush out its tenderness, he would bruise away its fragrance, he would mar its beauty. He would make it a thing that had never been.

He belonged to himself. Not because he was of any value but because he existed. He was his own possession. Worthless but his own. That he would not barter for the cheap emotions that were common to all men. Walk the streets. There they were, a man and a woman, a man and a woman, a man and—each capable of feeling as he felt, each proudly thinking himself singled out for a particularly fine kind of love. Ugly debased creatures, some of the men were, yet over the ugliest some woman hung and, with love in her eyes, called him wonderful! It was to this blinding passion that he was asked to yield. . . .

A pair of serious gray eyes, a slightly tilted nose, a mouth smiling, full lipped, golden-brown hair that caressed, lovingly, ear and neck. . . .

He would not yield. He did not demand ecstasy unless he found it in himself. That was the quest of fools. He was without sentiment, some one had said. Well, he would be without it, he would at least be above it. . . .

How soft had been the carpet of velvet that stretched down Fifth Avenue that night, and shot and torn by the street lights . . .

Good God in Heaven, why must he take out of his life the most beautiful thing that had come into it?!

VIII

DURING the summer and early fall, *The Clarion* had prospered and had escaped official notice. It could not escape for ever. In November, the blow fell and the paper was barred from the mails. The situation became serious. The radicals were agitated, alarmed. Efforts were made to secure the return of the second-class privilege, but they failed. Circulation fell off, resources were drained, economy was the watchword.

The action of the government did more than cripple the publication: It attracted to it unfavorable attention. The hot-headed young men, of whom the city was full, looked upon it with loathing as pro-German and anti-draft. Wherever a group of these youngsters got together, there was talk of raiding *The Clarion*. Such things had occurred in America; they were not beyond the limits of democracy's mobs.

Those who worked on the paper expected, each evening, to hear the mob come shouting down the street ready to break in, to destroy, to beat, possibly to kill.

Bruce sat at his desk one night mauling over a pile of copy. The editorial room was empty. The copy readers were at supper and the reporters were on their assignments. One man from the advertising department sat at the telephone. The room was quiet but for the subdued noise that came from the composing room. Ball, the advertising man, left the telephone and came over to sit down near Bruce.

"Heard anything lately?" he asked.

"No more than usual. They're still talking."

"I told 'em downstairs they ought to put iron shutters on the windows."

"Nonsense. What good would that do? They'd rip them off in a minute."

"How would it be to get some of the husky young comrades to act as a guard?"

"Rotten. They'd only get into trouble without doing us any good."

"I suppose so. It seems damned silly, though, that we can't protect ourselves or the property."

"Maybe. But that's war. When the world goes out gunning, you're *It* whether you want to be or not. Any way they haven't come yet and it's a fair bet they won't come. We're out of their way and besides there are a lot of Socialists in every crowd."

"I got a hunch, they're coming, and it ain't because I hope they come, either."

"All right. Have it your own way. If they come, they come. It won't be the first beating I've taken and, unless they do a mighty thorough job of it, it probably won't be the last. It's all in a life time."

"Sure, you can talk. But I got a little girl uptown and the news that I'd been cracked on the old bean with a rock wouldn't make her any more chirpy."

A little girl uptown! Everybody had a little girl somewhere, a girl for whom he worked, of whom he thought, to whom he belonged. They liked it, apparently. They liked the sense of that little girl in the background.

Margarete! He had not seen her since that night when she called out to him and he

turned away. To that extent at any rate he had won. He had not gone back. To that extent—and no farther. He was amazed at the tenacity of this new passion. It was part of himself; it had got into the cells of his brain, into his blood. It was an essence that filled him. To rid himself of it, was to empty himself, to leave a shell, a dry case, a thing—hollow and worthless.

He told himself, "That's plain nonsense. A thing of that sort can't happen. I'm neurotic. Margarete can attract me and I let her. I call this an essence. Stuff! It's in my own mind. It might be self-hypnosis, but it isn't even that because I can stand off and look at it—and know what I am doing. I've idealized her, created such a woman as never was in the world. She has been merely the clay. And if a creature like this one I've imagined in her likeness were to come to life, I'd hate it."

That thought made him catch his breath. It was quick with something new, strange, gripping. Such a woman, the illusive and impossible she, he would hate. She would be perfect; that is to say, she would be terrible. He had no skill, no man had the skill, to love perfection. He could love the quest of perfection—the thing itself would be destructive.

But Margarete? She was not perfect. She had faults, trifles light as air, but palpable. She was human. She had temper and vanity and intolerance—and he could not hate her. He could not rid himself of her image and her gray serious eyes. She was his ideal of imperfection. Another might find her perfect. Another? The eternal male roused in him. In that moment he was primeval, brutal, murderous. The hot wave passed and he smiled at his flash of fury. She was not his, she could never be his. There were forms that came out of the past and stood between them. Even if she loved him and if he were willing to lie still in his fetters, she could never be his.

Here, in his bewilderment, he faced a double psychology. To surrender freely, of his own will, might be possible; to surrender at the point of necessity taxed his powers. He would not be a slave, no—but he had no right to be a slave. The disposition of himself was not in his own hands.

A clamor, an uproar, broke into his meditations. Its volume increased and it came from the street beneath his windows.

Ball rose and stood in the center of the room. "My God," he said, "My God!"

Bruce laughed and his laugh was not pleasant to hear. He tossed aside his eye shade and removed his glasses. The lust for battle was on him.

"Here they are. Now for it."

From outside the building came a deafening tumult. It was impossible to estimate the size of the mob. However small, two men could make little resistance.

A single flight of stairs led from the street entrance to the editorial rooms. It flashed into Bruce's mind that two men, at the head of those stairs, might keep a hundred, unarmed, at bay. It was a chance, one in a million. Together he and Ball ran for the head of the stairs.

In that instant Bruce saw a lone man going out into the night to face four armed enemies. That lone man had battled and escaped, for his destiny had not been fulfilled.

This might be the end for Bruce. And Margarete? He saw her dimly and her face was lined with pain.

The invaders rushed at the stairs and the two men above set themselves for the attack,

but the leaders of the mob called out in friendly tones.

Bruce sickened at the fiasco and his strength left him. He leaned against the wall, white and weak, while the Socialists swarmed around him. They had held a meeting and received large financial aid for the paper. They were celebrating the happy event.

The comrades, in their enthusiasm, picked him up and bore him back to his desk. They filled the room with their hurrahs and their jargon of talk.

Bruce put on his glasses and his eye shade, settling behind them as behind a shield. The copy readers returned. They ousted the visitors from their chairs and sat down at the big desk. The Editor came in. The cheers were renewed at his appearance. But the work of the evening must go forward. The intruders were tactfully herded out. They went away sounding their pæan.

It was not a pleasant night for Bruce. His nerves were on edge. It was as though he had been personally affronted. The clamor should have come from a mob bent on destruction. His fists still itched—and Margarete lingered near him, a maddening apparition. The desk men, the reporters felt the tension.

"The old man's sore 'cause he didn't get a fight," they muttered to each other.

"Watch your step tonight. He'll break out some place."

"What of it? He'll always smile at yo' after givin' yo' hell."

A voice rang through the room. "Herbert. Herbert!"

"Here I am." A young Jew drew near Bruce's desk. He grinned but he was stricken with fear.

Bruce held a piece of copy in his hand. He shook it at Herbert as he asked, "Do you know Yiddish?"

"No, I don't know Yiddish." The voice was strongly nasal and there was a slight lisp.

"Here, read this copy you just turned in. You'll see it wouldn't take you long to learn Yiddish."

The copy readers laughed. Herbert, flushed, abashed, hesitated until Bruce smiled at him. Then he took the story away to re-write it.

Bruce threw a piece of copy, with head attached, across the table. "Hoy, for the love of God, try that again. Write a head this time, not a jumble of legs and arms."

"That's what I thought I'd done."

"Jesus! Don't think. When you stop to think you go wrong." He lowered his voice as he turned from Hoy to a man who was bending over a piece of copy and grinning. "You aren't supposed to hatch that copy, Louis. The idea's to write a head and get it back. Two or three hours ought to be enough for one B-head."

"All right, Bruce, all right."

"Between that bunch of wild Indians that piled in here and you gents who seem to have checked your brains with your hats at supper and forgot to get 'em when you came out, God knows whether we'll have a paper tomorrow or not."

"Don't say that, Bruce. Think how bad Daniels would feel."

"And a bunch of reporters that think this is the morning edition of *The Forward*! How yo' getting along with your Yiddish, Herbert?"

But Bruce was wrong, as every newspaper man will know. The paper was put to bed on time. Bruce came back, from seeing the last form sent away, to a deserted editorial room. There was no dog watch on *The Clarion*. He was tired, and there was a dull ache at the base of the skull. One more edition gone forever. He brushed a big bunch of proofs onto the floor and set his desk in order. He took down his overcoat and hat and put them on. He took his gloves from the pocket of the coat, hooked his walking stick over his arm, and went out.

He looked musingly at the head of the stairs where he had expected to do sanguinary battle. It had passed him by. A cold east wind drove up Pearl Street. He turned his back upon it and walked towards Park Row. He crossed that street in the direction of a light that came from an all-night Child's. The boys were in there drinking coffee, eating ill-chosen breakfasts and talking. He was in no mood to join them; in his present sour temper he would spoil their mirth. To some of them the time of laughter would be short. The draft had laid its fingers upon them. They would be sent to lie in mud, to fight unmentionable vermin, to endure misery and sickness and death.

He walked across to the elevated and rode to Christopher Street. He descended. Jefferson Market and Jefferson Market Police Court were on his left—a gloomy mass. He turned his back upon Greenwich Avenue, along which his course lay to Bank street and a cheerless room, and crossed Sixth Avenue. He advanced slowly, with the movements of a weary, pain-racked man. At Washington Place he turned towards the Square. Half way down the block he paused opposite an apartment house.

There he stood in the cold wet wind, leaning on his stick, staring at the flat façade of an ordinary apartment house. The windows were blank, like the open eyes of a dead man. A faint light burned back of the main entrance but all else was black—black and empty as though the place had been abandoned before some breath of death.

Over on Sixth Avenue a surface car clanged by. A taxi roared for an instant on Macdougal Street and was gone. The world was again empty. A mist got into the wind; the street and the pavement were wet with it. Bruce shivered but he did not remove his eyes from the building. He was waiting. For what? A miracle. This realist, this scoffer, waited for a miracle. It did not occur to him that it was colossal impudence to stand in the rain and the wind, to brace his exhausted body against cold and pain, and wait, calmly, in the heart of New York, for the laws of nature to be subverted in his behalf. He did not expect the impossible to take place, but he waited.

He was not disappointed. The building remained blank and black. Nature pursued her beaten paths. A policeman, swinging his night stick, approached.

"What yo' doin' here?" he asked.

"Just being a damned fool, officer."

"Yo' didn't pick out a very nice night fer it. If I was you, I'd call it a job and beat it." The officer went on. He was, perhaps, not unfamiliar with the type and the symptoms.

Bruce hooked his stick over his arm, thrust his wet, gloved hands into his pockets and turned wearily homeward.

IX

THE fall, with its vast movement of troops, with its mounting war mania, its bloody speeches, its full and unvaried jingoism, its parade of sentiment by the President, the Hudson Dusters and patriotic college presidents, swept on into oblivion. Intolerance was rampant; intelligent men were arrested; an involved and dreadful espionage system was in force. A hundred million people were being driven to think alike. They were told, and they believed, that the life of the nation was at stake, that the cause of Democracy was being tried on the murderous fields of Europe. They became a unit in their opinions and their hatreds.

To the ravages of war was added the scourge of the Spanish influenza. It had appeared the year before; it came with redoubled strength as the winter of 1918 opened. It swept over New York, it spread to the surrounding country, it passed inland—and it left in its wake thousands of victims, snuffed out over night, or broken and spent, to toil through weary weeks back towards health.

That was a gloomy and a sad Christmas. It was hard to believe, in the midst of these sorrows and oppressions, that Christ was born. Weeping mothers and wretched fathers, bereaved wives and sweethearts, orphaned children and the old and the poor thrown upon their own resources, filled the land with their lamentations. And the cup of their misery was not yet overflowing.

As the New Year dawned, New York tried to excite itself, to remember and recall its vanished gaiety. Its efforts were of the surface only. There were noise and drinking and bright lights; men and women danced and made love and quarreled in a glittering imitation of the old way of things. It was but sounding brass. The soul was fled from the city's mirth.

Bruce, looking upon this life with understanding eyes, was shocked at its artificiality. It revealed the depth to which the canker had eaten. Honest dissipation was gone; there were merely the trappings of debauchery.

He turned from it, but in himself he found no relief. There he saw only dark hues, grays tending to black. He looked ahead and there was no light. No man could see the end of this struggle. And afterwards——.

There was a New Year's card from Margarete. He found it in his mail at the office. It was a greeting, the briefest possible. He turned it over and over in his hands. It held secrets but it kept them. How far away that time was. The girl from whom this card came had become a stranger, yet she called him "Bruce" and signed herself "Margarete." A stranger? His hand shook as he took down the telephone receiver and gave central a well-remembered number. Miss Bursell was not at home.

He attacked his work, forcing a concentration that blotted out recollection. He wrestled with his tasks as an old athlete who is nearing the end. All he had he gave to the job. He was draining himself and he exalted in the sacrifice.

The card, dropping out of emptiness, had stirred him. Why had he tried to telephone her? What would he have said had she answered? He did not know. It was an impulse and

it was irresistible . . . He tried again. She had not come in. In desperation he left his name.

The work slackened. The men went out to supper. With his desk cleared, Bruce leaned back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head. His face was without color and the eyes were heavy and tired. The past year had traced new lines on his cheeks and added much gray to his hair. He had stood across the path of a world making its own history and he had been bruised and trampled on. He had stood in the way of his own advancing soul and he had been dashed aside and mocked. He had tried, by an act of will, to tear out his life—and he had failed. He had curbed his actions; he could not freeze his heart.

He knew now that he had failed. Either he had weakened with the years or this love was more intimately a part of him than his love for his son had been. That he had rooted out. This refused to go. Was it possible he had not succeeded so thoroughly in ousting Jack as he had thought? In this moment the boy seemed very close to him. Around his neck were a pair of passionately clinging arms and he heard a baby voice: "I love you all the grasses in the yard and all the trees in the forest and all the deep holes in the earth and all the stars in the sky."

With hard finger and thumb he pressed down the lids over aching eyes.

"For you, Mr. Darton," said the girl at the switchboard.

He shook himself free of memories that maddened and wearily took up the receiver. A great flood of color flowed into his face, it tinged his ears, it spread to his neck. When he spoke his voice was husky.

"I want to see you—I must see you. At once. Yes. Wait for me."

He seized hat and coat and ran down the stairs and out into the January evening. His heart raced and his feet outsped it. He was alive. Thank God, he had lived until this minute. The elevated train crept on its way uptown, but it crept and he came at last to Christopher Street. He was a boy again and he leaped down the stairs and dashed across Sixth Avenue. A taxi missed him by an inch. No matter; it had missed.

He stood panting, clutching his side, caught at the last instant with terror, outside Margarete's door. He rang the bell and Margarete stood before him. He was without words but he moved swiftly and took her in his arms.

It was a long time before they turned from the door, entered her living-room and sat down. It was only then that he noticed the uniform she wore.

"Margarete, what's all this mean?"

"The flu, you know. There are no nurses—not nearly enough. I've been in training ever since—oh, for a long time. I had to do something."

"Margarete!"

"You can say 'Margarete' all you like. You're a terrible person—and I love you. I shouldn't. If I had a shred of self-respect I wouldn't. But I haven't and I do."

"Margarete!"

"Is that the only word you know?"

"It's the dearest."

"It's about time you said something nice. Were you happy after——"

"It was hell."

"And who made it? I suppose you'll say I did."

“No. I’ve been making little hells for myself all my life. This was the worst. I couldn’t get through it. I had to come back.”

“Now I suppose you’ll make a worse hell for yourself.”

“No. I’m through with that forever and ever. Unless——”

“Don’t you ever get through with ifs and buts and unlesses?”

“I have to tell you something.”

“Go ahead. That’s better than not telling me.”

“You don’t know anything about my life. You must know. . . .”

She sat in front of him and listened calmly, a smile of sad understanding wrinkling the corners of her eyes. He was white and worn when he finished and his eyes were as those of a dumb animal, pleading.

She rose and for a moment her hand rested on his hair. Then she stooped and kissed him . . .

“You haven’t had dinner? Neither have I. Let me get you some.”

“You understand—everything, Margarete?”

“Haven’t I answered you? . . . I’m going to get dinner now.”

In boyish mirth, he helped her and they sat down to eat while a joy that was half pain filled their hearts.

“You won’t again, Bruce, ever leave me—like that?”

“Never. Not till you send me away.”

“I’ll never do that.”

“You can’t tell, Margie. You’re too young to know.”

“I know. If you’re only half as sure——”

“I’m absolutely certain. If you only knew—I can’t tell you—how I tried to kill this love—and it wouldn’t die. I told you about Jack. You see you’re more to me than he was for I could put him out of my life. I couldn’t put you out.”

“I tried, too, Bruce, and I failed. You wouldn’t let me forget you.”

“My darling . . . But, Margie, what are we going to do? I still have a wife.”

“Maybe she got a divorce. It’s over four years.”

“I don’t know. She said she wouldn’t. If she hasn’t——”

“We’ll talk of that when the time comes. And you’re not to worry, Bruce. Do you understand? You are not to worry. We’ll manage. She has no right to hold you—and I won’t let her. Do you understand, Bruce?”

She was majestic—the female incarnate, demanding her man. She transcended the conventions, destroyed them and passed on. She would defy friends, relatives, society. There was a barrier. She circled it and it ceased to exist. There were standards. She tore them to bits and set up new ones of her own. There were ideals; she established higher ones. She knew but one law and she was supreme in her recognition of it and in her indifference to all others.

Bruce was enthralled by her fine disdain. He had seen her charming, vivacious, conventional. He now saw her scorn for the little ways of the world. He was captivated but he was miserable. He resisted this supreme sacrifice.

“Margarete! You mustn’t. If you mean——”

“You know what I mean. Our lives are not to be ruined by a boy’s mistake. You’ve told me enough. You are far from being an angel, Bruce, but you are adorable. You are—no matter. I wouldn’t change you. I love you. I wish you were free but you aren’t, or maybe you aren’t. If you aren’t——” Something fierce came into her eyes, her face, and she came to stand close to him. “Bruce, if she were here, now, in New York, and you loved me, I’d take you from her. She had you to have and to keep and she couldn’t keep you. Oh, it was mostly your fault, Bruce, I see that, but she didn’t try hard enough. She didn’t know what she was losing. There, I’ve said it.”

Her face changed. The flush and the fury died out of it. The half-serious smile returned to her lips, she was a little wearied by this passing gust of emotion. She brushed back the hair that caressed ear and neck.

“Forgive me, Bruce. I’ve said a lot of things I shouldn’t have said. They’re out now. And I mean them, Bruce. You’ll see. First find out about her. We’ll be honest with the silly old world if we can. You’ll let me have my own way that far, Bruce?”

That far and farther. In everything. He had surrendered without reservations. An emotion that was tender and deep and tranquil possessed him.

X

THAT winter New York went in sackcloth—but there were no ashes. The coal famine had come—the heatless, meatless days. Bruce saw them standing in line with their poor pails and baskets and bags waiting for the few pounds of coal that might check the invading, freezing cold. They were stolid and for the most part they endured in silence. He saw them, these poverty-gripped creatures, standing in line to buy their pittance of bread. "The French have a genius for forming baker's queues," Carlyle had said. Bruce saw that genius at work in New York. The women stood for hours, patient, enduring, waiting for the chance to get a pittance of bread. It was war—and they accepted it. It was war, a thing loathsome to most of these wretched men and women, yet since the lords of the earth had decreed it, they acquiesced—and endured.

They were the victims—but they did not complain. What held them? What spirit moved in them to go patiently beneath their burden? Bruce looked upon them with narrowed, uncomprehending eyes. Their sons and their husbands had been taken from them. Their relatives in Europe had been fed into the ghastly mill. They grumbled dismally or wailed softly, but they made no real protest.

Back of the bread line and the coal line, back of the men and women who moved up and down Broadway and Fifth Avenue he became conscious of a spirit, an ideal, that gripped them, that drove them as a unit, that taught them to accept their pains, that won from them sacrifices and that touched their tears with something akin to divine radiance. It baffled, but it was sublime; it was the essence of pain but it was beautiful.

It was oppressive. He walked the streets bewildered, conscious that he was out of harmony with the thousands who passed him. All of them lived beneath the blanket of war, but they breathed and were not aware of their suffocation. Transports carried their young men from them to hurl them into Europe—and they were glad. The Government took over the railroads and a frightful congestion of freight resulted; it was part of the war and they accepted it. The world was topsy-turvy, its broad base resting on torn hearts, mangled soldiers, starving paupers—and they did not rend the sky with their outburst of rage.

The flu dragged its shadow across this chaos—a figure silent, unseen, fearful, murderous. It defied the doctors who did their poor best. This enemy had caught them unprepared. They worked, not sparing themselves or their nurses, but they labored, that black winter, impotently, in the dark. Trailing the flu was pneumonia and those whom the first fiend spared fell victims to the second. There was a sound of mourning in the city but all this suffering was a part of the war; the people shed their tears but they did not outrage heaven with their prayers.

Bruce looked upon this misery and cursed. Hatred of war and of the conditions that made war possible burned in him. The feeling flamed out in his work for *The Clarion*. His name went down on the list of those who were suspect. For the first time the government gave him its attention. Careful account was kept of his actions and his words. He moved beneath the shadow of a nation's anger and he was unconscious of his danger.

Almost suddenly the test came. The winter and spring passed. More thousands, many more thousands of young Americans went overseas. In Europe the spring drive of 1918 was on. The German hordes were hurling themselves at Paris in a last desperate effort to break through. They failed, but their failure was a shocking victory for the Allies. Paris was saved, but the manhood of France was disappearing.

At that instant Bruce came face to face with a problem that could not be dodged. The draft age had been raised and the day for his registration was at hand. He had thought of himself as a conscientious objector and yet—— He damned war and he damned the powers that made war and yet—— Something fierce, deep within him, called to him, something fierce and ruthless; some primeval instinct, the soul of the remote ancestor from whom he had his green eyes; some murderous, subconscious throb against which he found it necessary to align all his thought and all his acquired culture. This thing called to him, called and drove, lacerating him into obedience. A conscientious objector? He visioned Bertram Russell and Liebknecht and the score of Americans he had known who had refused to put on a uniform. His mind paid them homage and yet. . . .

He was the son of his father and his father had unhesitatingly sacrificed all in his opposition to war. But back of his father was a long line of fighters whose blood stirred in him. Their voices boomed down the centuries. He cursed war, but he could not curse loudly enough to drown out those insistent voices. Even as he swore he would not go to war, he would not register, he was on his way to secure his registration card.

A woman sat at the desk in the Public School building on Greenwich Avenue and took down the data he gave her. She was gray haired and matronly and she smiled brightly at him. He could see the wheels moving in her head: “Here is another fit to carry a rifle.” He looked at her wonderingly. Then he caught through the haze a shade of enlightenment. “Probably,” he thought, “she has a son over there. The more of us they send over, and the quicker we are sent, the safer that son will be.” He hugged that idea; it was at least rational. No other that he could think of was.

She gave him his card and he looked at it solemnly. It had a tragic significance. He was no longer his own man. He was subject to call. If the war lasted, and there was no end in sight, that call would surely come. They would clothe him in a uniform, put a rifle in his hands, teach him to move as a mere bit of a vast machine, to stand at attention, to march on parade, to salute. They would show him how to drive a bayonet through the throat of an enemy or parry with a thrust at the bowels. They would send him to wade in blood; to see men die, and go on; to hear their screams, and go on. They would harden his heart and blast out his soul. He would be nothing—a number on a tag fastened to a chain around his wrist.

He would look upon men, whom he did not know and did not hate, with murder in his mind. He would kill that he be not killed. And in the end some bullet or bayonet or fragment of shell would bring release.

In this he had no sense of fear. He had elbowed Death too often to dread his grim visage. But that it should come now and in this way. After many years his life had been given a purpose and an understanding. He was flush with the joy of living. He had come unscathed through years of indifference to life, to the moment when life was dear. Through tears and travail, he had learned kindness and they would make him a brute. In anguish he had learned tolerance and they would teach him murder. These precious things

had come to him from Margarete—and they would drag him away from her.

The possibility of getting a soft job in the army did not occur to him. He saw himself only as a private. If he must go, he wanted it to be in the ranks, one of the men, a buck private, perhaps, in time. One of the men, one of those who believed in the cause and fought because of that belief; one of those who cursed the officers and obeyed blindly, who damned the army and was proud of it, who berated the mess sergeant and ate the food. Yes, when they called the name that appeared on the card he held in his hand, he hoped they would put him in the ranks.

Margarete was a little white when he showed her the card, but she was a little white most of the time these days. The winter's work had not been easy. She was unused to such labor and she had not spared herself. There were so many sick and so few nurses! And not all of the nurses were willing to go into the homes that needed them most, the homes of poverty, where the pinch of hunger was and no coal. Margarete had gone to these people, her mother heart yearning over the wretchedness that had no friends. Night after night Bruce had gone to one or another vile tenement, where, in spite of the cold, the air was noisome and freighted with disease, and taken the girl home. For such trips they indulged in taxis and she would lean her head on his shoulder and lose herself in the luxury of rest and love. He had only praise for her devotion to duty and a great admiration for her courage; but he spent himself in prayers for her safety and his heart sobbed as the lines came into her face.

She studied the card, turning it over and over in her hand.

"It's terrible, Bruce. But I'm glad and my pride in you will help me bear it."

At that he looked at her with eyes that narrowed and a cold fear clutched at his heart.

"Your pride?"

"Yes. It's only your duty, but still——"

"Good God! My duty! I fought to keep away from the damned thing. I hate it."

"Bruce!"

"Hate it. It's a wretched, frightful mess. Killing, killing without the least excuse for it."

"Bruce, Bruce! Don't please, don't say things I can't ever forget."

"I don't want you to forget them. I want you to know that I think war is just plain madness."

"You wouldn't say that if you were in France."

"I'd say that if I were in France or Belgium or anywhere else. I damn it—start and finish and I damn the governments that make it possible."

Red spots were beginning to burn in Margarete's cheeks and there was a dangerous flash in her eyes.

"You are talking very wildly," she said. "If you were a Bolshevik you couldn't say anything worse."

"No, I couldn't," he cried. "They are the only people in Europe who have shown any brains."

"You praise them!" She looked at him as though he were a strange animal that had suddenly crossed her path, a strange and particularly loathsome animal. "You, I suppose,

would talk the same if the Huns landed in America."

"Yes, I would talk the same and feel the same. Nothing can justify madness."

"You!" the girl said and looked at him. She loaded the one word with insult and abuse.

The blood leaped into Bruce's cheeks and in his ears was the roar of a great passion. Blindly he rose and moved towards the door while murder stalked at his side.

"Here's your bit of pasteboard," Margarete said. "It may keep you out of jail."

She held the registration card out to him and he snatched it away. During the moment that he stood looking at her his fingers were busy tearing the card to bits. Then he dropped the pieces on the floor and went out.

XI

LONG ago this man had cursed emotion and lived. Now his emotion stood up and cursed him and he did not die. There was, for a brief time, a whirling turmoil within him, a screaming chaos that impinged on reason. It passed. Not for nothing had he, in the old days, struggled through introspective hells. Out of those efforts he found the strength to endure and because of them he won through. Once with the poison in his hand he had joggled death, and that experience tended now to preserve his sanity. He was drained but he entertained no thought of suicide.

To his surprise he found that his bitterness was against himself, not against Margarete. She had but followed a natural course. She had been logical and consistent. It was he who had opposed nature, who had followed a devious path. He had hated war but he had registered. He should have avoided that humility. It became clear to him that Margarete's scorn was directed at his irrational conduct. He had betrayed his principles. That justified her contempt.

But that line of thought was meaningless. They were separated. He could say it to himself calmly. It had come as a flash of lightning. Beauty had been blasted into hideousness. Not all the forces of nature could remove that devastation. He had been seared. A red scar had been branded across his soul. He had been a coward, only in that light could he view his obedience to the law, and he had paid the price of his cowardice. He had thought; he had refused to act. He had juggled with an idea that budded towards a conviction. He should have stood by that conviction, though heaven and hell rushed upon him. There lay his rock of salvation. He had avoided it and the quagmire was swallowing him.

In the cold fury of this moment he was forced to look narrowly at himself. All of his life he had stepped aside. He had yielded to Clarence in the early boyhood days; he had yielded when his weakness meant suffering to his mother; he had bent to Cora and tried to make his life meet her demands; he had surrendered to his own weakness when he tore Jack out of his heart and he had compromised when he put away the poison.

From the height to which the present cataclysm hurled him, he could see the strangely twisting path along which he had crawled. At the sight he was dizzy with self-abhorrence.

He sought for a rock upon which to stand, a compass by which to guide himself that he might keep his face steadily to the front. He found it in his honest opposition to war. Only by realizing this is it possible to understand the decisiveness with which he threw himself into the struggle waged by the pacifists. No longer were his words equivocal. No longer could any reader of *The Clarion* doubt his position.

In the midst of this grim setting of a unit against a nation, the fourth year of the war ended. For New York it came at a time of intolerable heat. During the first week of August, 1918, new insufferable records were set by the weather. Day after day the thermometer climbed to above ninety, and the nights, still and humid, brought little relief. The madness of suffocation came to afflict a city that had endured the madnesses of disease and war.

Thousands of burning wretches fled from the homes that had become furnaces and spent the nights on the beaches at Coney Island, Brighton or Far Rockaway. Those who could not reach the sea stretched themselves on the grass of Central or Van Cortland or the Bronx parks. Bruce, on his way from work in the early morning, saw sweltering human beings lying in City Hall Park—half-clothed, unable to sleep, they were the pale specters of souls in torment.

All the time the horrid monster that Bruce had set himself to fight was raging in Europe. The midsummer drive was on and the Germans were being slowly crowded back. Little by little the Allied troops advanced, literally blasting the enemy before them. At this Confidence raised its head and whispered into the hot nights, "It is the beginning of the end." Hope, four years hibernating, stirred uneasily, not daring as yet to stand wide awake. The German line was not broken, the German artillery was not silenced. Big Bertha was hurling defiance at faraway Paris and death bombs still fell from aeroplanes. But in spite of this, the belief that the war was won, that the conflict was sweeping to a swift termination, got abroad, fired the dull imagination and served to ease the pains of the afflicted.

At *The Clarion* office an air of jubilation reigned. For a year and a half those men had looked daily into the open door of a prison. They had seen others, their leaders and guides and comrades, pass through those portals and their own fates still hung in the balance. To them the end meant freedom and the cessation of barbarous things.

Bruce hoped, half-believed, but the energy of neither his pen nor his tongue was abated. He brandished his defiance. It was worth while, this belated protest; worth while, at least, to himself. He was living his convictions and there was no fear in him. Was he fighting windmills? At any rate he was attacking giants—and the giants did not turn to destroy him.

One morning before he was up he was called to the telephone in the hall on the first floor. A strange voice greeted him.

"Mr. Darton? This is Dr. Clarke. I am telephoning at the request of Miss Bursell. She is at the Roosevelt hospital. She asked me to let you know if . . . Yes. Yes, I'm afraid it's —serious. Do you hear? She came down with the flu—later pneumonia. I was to telephone you if her condition became critical. Do you hear? Mr. Darton, do you——"

The hall, a moment since flooded with sunlight, had grown black. Bruce clung to the wall telephone to keep from falling. His laboring lungs struggled for air. A tempest raged in his ears. He could not think, he could not feel; he could only cling desperately to his support and wait for the uproar to die away. Slowly the blackness lifted, the sun returned, the floor quieted itself, the pounding heart steadied. He turned again to the 'phone but Dr. Clarke had hung up.

Margarete was sick, dying—Margarete was sick—Margarete. . . . His brain would not function. Mechanically he returned to his room. He sat down on the bed. Margarete was sick. . . . He sat still, waiting. Sometime he would be able to get past that point and then he would again be able to think. Margarete was dying. . . . He covered his face with his hands. A slow shudder tore him. He raised his head and looked out of the window. The sun was shining, a fall sun that shone at a low angle across the buildings on the south side of the street. Trucks and cars roared beneath him. A huckster passed, ringing a bell and shouting unintelligibly. That was the world out there—he could sense that. But Margarete

——

Bruce sprang up and ran again to the telephone. Swiftly he turned the pages of the directory looking for the hospital number. He found it but he had no nickel and was forced to return to his room for one.

He stood still and his mind took up the refrain, Margarete is sick, dying—Margarete —— With an effort he beat those words down. She had asked the doctor to telephone him. She had asked—— He did not dare consider the meaning of that. He had not known—had he known—how little he had moved away from her during this separation! Away from her? God! She was an essence in his blood; she was as intimately part of him as his own soul.

At that, he snapped into action. In fierce haste he threw his clothes on. He had now but one thought: to get to the hospital. He must see her, he must win from her some gesture of understanding, a look of forgiveness. If he came too late for that . . . He ran from the house. He was unfortunate in his haste, for he bumped squarely into a solid, heavy man who was approaching.

"Sorry," Bruce said and was going on, but the stranger laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Just a minute. Been drinkin', eh?"

"No," Bruce cried. "No. Take your hand off me."

"Keep your shirt on, Mister. For all I know you may be one of these chaps I'm lookin' for. Suppose you give me a look at your registration card."

Bruce looked at the man and realized that, at last, he had fallen into the hands of the law.

"I haven't it with me," he said.

"Don't know you're supposed to carry it, eh? Where do'u live?"

"Right there."

"All right. Let's you and me go in and have a look at this card."

"I've lost it."

"Oh, no wonder you ain't got it. Lost it? Reported its loss?"

"No."

"Suppose you and me take a walk and you can explain all this to the Captain."

"My God, Officer," Bruce cried, "I can't go, I can't."

"Just do your best and we'll see if we can't manage it," the man said and grinned.

For an instant Bruce hung fire. He had come a long way to reach this moment of perfect torture. He had prepared for himself this last drop of misery and he could not escape his own handiwork. It was perhaps the awakening of the man within him that made it possible for him to say quietly:

"I'll go with you."

The Captain listened patiently to his explanation. Bruce concluded by telling definitely the time and place of registration. "Surely," Bruce said, "the records will show that I am telling the truth and I shall have no trouble in identifying myself."

"May be," the Captain admitted. "We'll have a look at the records. Meanwhile, you stick around with us until we get this thing straightened out."

A door opened. He passed through. The door closed and was locked behind him. He was in a room with several other men, each of whom paused in his talk long enough to look critically at Bruce. Then they turned away and the talk burst forth again.

Bruce found a secluded place on a bench in the corner and sat down. He was quiet. The fire within had burned itself out. He could not understand this apparent tranquillity. It was unnatural. He should have stormed and raged. But he sat still, pondering the state in which he found himself. Only long afterwards did he understand that in the fateful apprehension of that moment he had sensed the presence of tragedy, moving swiftly, irresistibly, and had set himself for the shock. In the fullness of his strength he had pitted himself against the world; he had spurned those things that the world held dear; he had fought for the right to be himself; to think his own thoughts, to be free. He had fought, and the struggle had worsted him. He was spent and broken.

He had neighbored happiness and turned his back upon it. He had stood face to face with his own son and he had denied him. He had been false to his fatherhood. He had looked into the soul of that child's mother and he had been blind to the beauties that were there. He had toyed with life, and life had turned and smitten him. These thoughts were in his mind and he was quiet. He faced them as they passed, a stately procession, before his mental eye. Their presence did not hurl him into the dust. He could endure them.

He told himself that he had failed. He had messed his life past untangling. In this moment he realized that he had not seriously tried. He had dreamed and hoped and stared about him. He had set his hand determinedly to the accomplishment of nothing. He had trifled and he had trifled with sacred things. He had hugged misery to him, digging the hell through which he toiled. He accepted this. That was his destiny. The last of this moving procession of pictures was at hand.

A pair of gray eyes, reproachful, tender, and golden hair that clung lovingly to ear and nape of neck. . . . This woman who lived and joyed in life, who neither feared nor shunned convention, who saw her way and went blithely toward the dark mysteries, had met him and held out a hand of help and understanding. He had touched those fingers and found them vital with a life and joy to which he was a stranger; he had touched those fingers and laid them upon his heart; he had touched . . .

The whip, the scourge, was in this last picture. This, even this, he had thrown aside. He had stopped her laughter, he had clouded her sun, he had thrown the chill of his own frozen waste over her soul. He had set a hope and a dream above love. Out of the deeps of his being, love had called to him. He had crushed it down, closed his ears to its appeal, hardened himself for a fight that would kill it. Great God in Heaven, what had life or eternity to give him in place of that tender passion?

He bowed his head to his knees and the little devils of remorse had their way with him. . . .

Time, the swift moving thief of happiness, dragged the weary seconds of pain. The hours of the afternoon stood still but the sun moved towards the West. With bloodshot eyes he looked out upon the lengthening shadows. He was helpless. A power, against which he could not contend, had caught him up, whirled him out of the life to which he was accustomed, left him isolated and lost in a wilderness of pain and despair.

It became impossible to remain inactive. He set to pacing the width of the room—back

and forth, back and forth. A hospital rose before him. A bed upon which a dying woman lay was revealed to him. A pair of gray eyes looked up at him, a white hand beckoned. . . . That way lay madness. Back and forth, he paced the daylight out of the sky, paced up the stars, paced the roar out of the city and paced in the sullen muttering of an endless night.

His incarceration was for all time. He had been locked in here and forgotten. There was no escape and no relief. Long before those doddering officials discovered he had told the truth and set him free, Margarete . . . God, when they came for him at the long last, he would tell them the truth, let them do with him what they liked. By that time he should have no interest in going forth into an empty world. An empty . . .

Exhaustion forced him down upon his bench.

Daylight and the clamor of his companions waked him. He had lived through the night. It was impossible. He had slept away an eternity. The door opened. A number of names were called. Automatically, Bruce responded to his. Someone was talking to him. He did not understand, he made no effort to understand. The others went out. Bruce followed them and found himself on the street. He stood still. He was free, but to what purpose? During the past twenty-four hours he had died many deaths and was still alive. He had been whirled horribly by little devils and he was still dizzy.

Without a conscious act of will he entered a telephone booth and called the hospital. Without hope he waited for the frightful reply to his inquiry. “No change.” “What?” “No change.” He would not believe his ears. “What did you say?” “The condition is unchanged.”

He left the receiver dangling and went out into the street. Something had happened. He could not, all at once, realize what. He found it difficult to breathe, and he tugged at his collar so that it came loose and the ends flopped over his shoulders. He walked on, crossing toward Broadway; he was moving aimlessly but directly. He was going to the hospital but he had not formulated to himself that thought.

At Broadway he turned North. He was looking for a taxicab but dozens whirled past him and he did not hail one.

Around him broke forth a great noise, a something that was more than the ordinary uproar of the city. It was the voice of a multitude, an ever increasing multitude. Ahead of him the street was full of people. Office buildings and stores were emptying their employees into the street, hurling them out into the desperately shouting host. The world had gone suddenly mad, but to Bruce there was nothing startling in that. The crowds gyrated and shouted; they climbed upon buses and taxicabs and screamed. It was bedlam and through it Bruce moved indifferently.

At Times Square a man crowded against him. Bruce drew away with a quick “Sorry,” but the man only laughed, slapped him on the shoulder and shouted,

“Cheer up. The war’s over.”

Bruce looked at him and was silent.

“Damn it,” the stranger cried, “can’t you even smile at that?”

Bruce went on. Something was hammering inside his head. At last, above the mighty tumult around him, he translated that hammering into the word “unchanged.”

At Forty-fourth Street and Seventh Avenue, the mob was packed solidly. He elbowed his way into it. With calm frenzy he fought for a way through it. He was crowded back,

pushed right and left, permitted to proceed, caught and held. He was tossed as the waves toss a board. He never abandoned his efforts. The multitude was endless but he struggled on. Little by little he gained. His collar was gone, his hat was brushed off and he did not try to recover it. "Unchanged." The word throbbed through him with the beating of his heart. The multitude was shouting it. Out of this uproar that was deafening, this mighty blending of bells, whistles, auto horns and human voices, he could hear distinctly only one word, "Unchanged." Millions upon millions of people were shouting it at him. Idiots screamed it at him from trucks heaped high with human beings. Men and women leaned out of high windows and hurled the word down upon him.

He had won through the densest of the crowd. He could go forward with comparative ease. A taxi loitered at his side. Bruce stepped in, telling the chauffeur to drive to the Roosevelt Hospital. He sank back against the cushions, digging hard knuckles into aching eyes. He was going to her but she was dying. She had sent for him but she was dying. She had sent for him ages and ages ago. How long? No matter. She had sent for him. Through this seething hell of noise and delirium she had sent for him. Why? God, God, why? For all the bitterness of his own folly he dared not answer that question. He had wasted precious months—their last months. He had stamped upon this fine spun thread of ecstasy. At the last moment . . . He approached the limit beyond which no one could pass and live. . . .

After many inquiries in the hospital he found Dr. Clarke and introduced himself. The doctor stared at this strange spectacle of a man.

"We expected you yesterday," he said.

"Am I too late?"

"No. Your delay—the nurse says—no matter. Wait. I'll let you know when you can go to her."

Steadily Bruce walked up and down the reception room. Through an eternity he continued his slow march. Long, long ago the fight for life in that room somewhere near him must have ended. She could not struggle forever. It was over and they were afraid to tell him. Afraid? For hours their horrible message had been booming in his ears. He had heard it and he still lived. They had nothing to fear.

A nurse appeared and beckoned to him. He went to her while the sudden agonized beating of his heart told him he had not yet drained the last drop of pain. The uniformed figure led the way down the corridor, opened a door, glided in and, after Bruce had entered, silently closed it behind him.

Bruce stood still and trembled. His heart was still beating wildly and he could not control the nervous shaking of hand and knee. For twenty-four hours he had held himself in check, and for twenty-four hours he had eaten nothing. He stood there, gray and shrunken, looking into the face of his beloved.

She had said: "Life is nothing without you, Bruce."

She had said: "I worship you. With every bit of me, I adore you."

She had said: "You are my god. Not because you are perfect but because that is the way I love you."

Now she lay on the bed, still and very white.

He sank to his knees and hid his face in her blanket.

This man who had been at strife with the whole world, who had raised himself above emotion, who had put sentiment from his life, who had set his heel upon love and deliberately crushed it out of his heart, this creature who had played God to himself, was bruised to the point of death because a girl lay white and still on a bed of sickness.

Slowly, with infinite effort, a wasted hand crept forward until the fingers touched the man's bowed head. At the contact all restraint and all pride went out of him and he became as a little child kneeling at the feet of its mother.

THE END.

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 *Man of Strife* by Grove Wilson]