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ANTENNAE



HULBERT  
FOOTNER

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# ANTENNAE

BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER



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ANTENNAE  
—A—  
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TO  
MY FIRST CRITIC

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# PART ONE: BOYS

# ANTENNAE

## PART ONE

### I

**W**ILFRED PELL stole down-stairs carrying his shoes. With infinite care he turned the handle of the front door, his heart in his mouth. When one pressed down a catch in the lock, it permitted the outside handle to turn; and one could come in again. He sat down in the vestibule to put on his shoes. There was also an outer door, closed when the family went to bed. This had an ordinary lock, and the key was in it. It had been Wilfred's intention to lock this door, and carry the key with him; but in the act of doing so the thought struck him: Suppose there was a fire? How would his Aunts get out?

He had not much of an opinion of the presence of mind of those ladies. They might very well stand there rattling the door, and burn up before they recollected the basement door. Or the way to the basement might be cut off. He pictured flames billowing up the basement stairs. No! let them take the chance of robbery in preference to incineration. He left both doors unlocked behind him. Sometimes the policeman on beat tried the basement gates as he passed through the block; but Wilfred had never seen him mount the stoops to try the front doors. On the sidewalk there was a horrible moment as he passed within range of Aunt May's windows over the drawing-room, then safety.

This was not his first sortie at ten o'clock. It was a way of release from the torment of his thoughts that he had discovered. That is, if he remembered it in time. Once the misery had him fairly in its grip he was helpless. It was this business of becoming a man. Sometimes he went for a walk early in the morning; but everybody knew about that; he could not hug the secret deliciously to his breast. Anyhow morning walks were for light hearts, he thought, with a gentle swell of self-pity. Night for him! How wistfully he looked back towards the cool zone of childhood. What happened to you was not pleasant. He had noticed a funny thing; if he had said to himself during the day: To-night I will sneak out—there was no virtue in it; he carried his earthiness with him. But if while he was in his bed he yielded suddenly to the impulse; and arose and dressed; a sort of miracle occurred; he forgot himself.



It was so to-night. The night took him. He was thrilled by the double line of still houses fronting each other; each house with its windows fixed unswervingly on its adversary across the street; the oblique stoop rails like beards; the cornices like eyebrows. And overhead the stars, deathless flowers in a meadow. Wilfred felt that he belonged. He was as much the street's as that cat creeping across, its belly hugging the asphalt. Like the cat he was all eyes, ears and nose; the thinking part of him had stopped working. He made a feint at the cat; and chuckled aloud at the creature's precipitate loss of dignity. Gee! how good it was to be out!

Respectable West Eleventh street was already settling down. Most of the outer doors were closed, and many bedroom windows showed rectangles of an agreeable apricot light filtering through the lowered shades. Wilfred had turned East, seeking life. At the corner of Fifth Avenue he was struck by the effect of the new arc lights. Hanging two to a pole, the mellow pinkish globes stretched far into the distance in two gradually converging lines. Like insect lights they climbed the Thirty-Fourth street hill at last and disappeared. Fruit of Night, Wilfred whispered to himself.

In Washington Square this mild October night there were still many couples sitting on the benches. The sight of them left Wilfred cold; he merely wondered at their static attitudes; hours, apparently, without moving or speaking. But once as he passed such a couple, a girl whose face was hidden in a man's neck, laughed softly in her throat, and Wilfred's breast was acutely disturbed by the sound. It suggested that that private nightmare of his might be a loveliness when shared; that it was the means whereby two human hearts might open to each other. Never for me! he thought with a needle in his heart; and hurried away from the sound.

Through Washington Place across Broadway; through Astor Place and down the Bowery. The bulk of Cooper Union loomed like a whale against the sky. The sight of it, brought the slightly foetid smell of the reading-room into Wilfred's nostrils. It was a place where you could go. The bums never looked at you. He breasted the Bowery like a swimmer. No early-to-bed habits here. He edged along close to the store-fronts, looking at everybody; entering into them; thieves, prostitutes, drunken men, sporting characters, and the great unclassified. So many and such queer souls each peeping suspiciously out of a pair of eyes. With the shuffling of the people, the four track line of electric cars in the middle of the street, and the steam cars of the Elevated railway immediately over the sidewalk, the uproar was at once distracting and stimulating.

There were certain store windows that Wilfred always looked into; the florist's full of green wire frames to serve as a foundation for funeral pieces;

a musical instrument dealer's exhibiting a gigantic brass horn and a doll's horn beside it to show the range of the stock; an animal and bird store with cages of monkeys. Something furtive and ugly in the eyes of the people watching the monkeys made Wilfred exquisitely uneasy. As you went on the stores became less reputable in character. Besides the crowding saloons, there were the auction sales, celebrated in the popular song; the dime museums and side shows with faded banners; an anatomical museum, free "for men only." All the shows had a free lobby to tempt you in. The most innocent were those with ranks of Edison's phonographs inside; but Wilfred recoiled from the little bone pieces you had to stick in your ears.

Glancing into a store window where mirrors were displayed, he saw repeated from every angle, the figure of a boy that his eyes embraced all over in a flash. A boy approaching sixteen, tall for his age; dressed in a shapeless snuff-colored suit, with trousers that flapped almost as if there were no legs within them. He walked with a long step having a funny little dip in the middle. He had wavy, light brown hair, a lock of which escaped untidily under the visor of his cap to sweep his forehead. His eyes, somewhat deep-set, were grey-blue in color, and had a look at once haunted, secretive and top-lofty—Wilfred's word. A wide mouth with uneven lips like a crimson gash across his white face. There was a something awkward about him; something self-centered and peculiar that set him apart from other boys. A boy to be jeered at. In that flash Wilfred saw it clearly.

Why . . . that's me, he thought, with self-consciousness winging back, making the picture hateful. Oh Lord! what a dub! The picture remained fixed in his mind amongst the multitude of pictures capable of turning up at any odd moment.

At Rivington Street he turned East again, entering another populous world quite different in style from that of the Bowery. Here, on a mild night the family life of the East side, predominantly Jewish, was revealed. This was Wilfred's objective. His solitariness was comforted by the vicarious sharing in many households. A narrow street hemmed in on either side by tall sooty tenements. The fronts of the houses were decorated with webs of rusty fire-escapes, the platforms of which were heaped with the overflow of goods from the crowded rooms within. From web to web criss-cross, everywhere ran the clotheslines with their fluttering damp burdens. In Rivington Street even the air was crowded.

The narrow sidewalk was maggoty with people. The inner side was lined by humble shops, the outer by an endless line of gay pushcarts like boats anchored alongside the curb, stretching for block after block and displaying every manner of goods. The low stoops between the shops were crowded,

mostly with women of a complete, unconfined fatness; nearly every one of them suckling an infant. These mothers surveyed the scene with an equanimity that arrested Wilfred. To have a whole lot of children must be one way of solving the riddle. He *liked* these featherbed women; because . . . it was difficult for him to find the word for his thought; they didn't fidget; they bore their fruit as inevitably as orchard trees. From the windows overhead leaned other fat women, comfortably supporting their forearms on pillows laid across the sills. Their faces expressed a great content.

Wilfred yielded himself to the scene of life. He had the sensation of straining open like petals. This was the pleasure they couldn't take away from him; a pleasure that left a sweet taste in the mind.—The lavish set-out of goods under the brown canvas shelters; apples floating in brine and unwholesome-looking preserved fish; rows upon rows of ratty fur neckpieces and muffs; bolts of printed cottons; gay garters and suspenders; jewelry; dazzling tinware. The pushcarts were lighted by smoking kerosene torches that threw leaping, ruddy lights and sooty shadows on the scene. I must notice everything; Wilfred would say to himself; and forthwith begin to enumerate a catalogue in his mind. But his darting eyes could not wait for the names of things; they flew ahead and he forgot the catalogue. Presently he would come to consciousness thinking: I am not noticing anything!

The people! The dirty, savage, robust children shouldering their way through the crowd, shrieking to each other. To these children grown-ups were no more than bushes obstructing their hunting paths. Then there were the young people; the scornful, comely youths flaunting their masculinity, and the pretty girls undismayed by it. Empty and hard these young people were; what of it? They were aware of their beauty, and of their desirability in each other's eyes; they were proud with youth; it was fine to see.

Wilfred turned North at last into a side street to find another way home. Dark streets had a different sort of attraction. No doubt the black houses were just as full of tenants as the others, but here, people were not drawn to the windows, nor down-stairs to the forbidding sidewalks. Only a group of men was to be seen here and there, on the steps, or loitering half-concealed in a vestibule. Night-birds, Wilfred thought with an intense thrill; cutthroats. How stirring to think of men who were restrained by nothing! Through each house there ran a narrow arched passage to a yard in the rear, where there was always, he knew, a second house hidden from the street. There would be a gaslight in the yard, and you would get a glimpse of greenish flagstones. By day or by night these passages teased Wilfred; but he had never dared to enter. In such dens *Oliver Twist* had been taught to steal; *Nancy Sikes* had been choked by the brutal *Bill*.

Wilfred soared like a bird. This was one of his “moments.” Why they came sometimes and not other times he did not know. His breast hummed like harpstrings. The seat of his intense feeling seemed to be somewhere at the back of his palate. It was almost the same as a pain, but it was rare! At such a moment nothing was changed; everything became more intensely itself. He was still Wilfred, but a Wilfred made universal. He entered into everything and became a part of it. At such a moment all tormenting questions were laid; it was sufficient that things were. Life was painted in such high colors that he was dazzled. The feeling of pain was due to the fact that he couldn’t take it all in. He had the actual sensations of soaring; he stretched his nostrils to get sufficient oxygen. Mixed with pure exaltation was the feeling: How wonderful of me to be feeling this way!

Impressions were bitten into his consciousness as with an acid. That frowning perspective of the confined street with its different planes of blacknesses; granite paving stones, flagged sidewalks, brick tenements; the whole was like a dead scale upon the living earth, which nevertheless one apprehended quivering underfoot. It was there, though it was not seen, the fertile earth capable of bringing forth forests. At either end of the block an arc light casting its unnatural beams horizontally through, picking out the ash cans and empty boxes grouped along the curb in fantastic disorder. Everywhere the bold shadows, black and sinister. Whether beautiful or ugly, it thrilled him through and through. Half way through the block, the door of a closely shuttered place was thrown open, letting out a startling shaft of light and a babel of voices; then sharply pulled to again. Oh, life, how marvellous!

At the approaching corner there was a saloon; and its side door, the “Family Entrance,” protected by the usual fancy porch of wood and glass, lay in Wilfred’s path. A discreet radiance came through the frosted glass. In the corner formed by this porch with the main building Wilfred beheld a group of six or eight boys standing with their shoulders pressed together in a circle, heads lowered. Their stillness, their uneasy looks over their shoulders, conveyed an intimation. He paused, all aghast inside as if he had been surprised by a wound. His spirit came diving down like a broken-winged bird. Little scorching flames were lighted in the pit of his stomach, and he tasted the bitterness of wormwood.

He walked on, trying to look unconscious. One of the boys was his own age, the others varying sizes smaller. As he came by, the big boy cast a wary look over his shoulder. Seeing Wilfred’s stricken face, the boy instantly knew how it was with him, and Wilfred knew that he knew. He felt as if he must die with shame. The boy’s face broke up in a horrid triumphant leer.

Wilfred was never to forget any detail of the look of that boy. He wore ribbed cotton stockings faded to a greenish hue, and button shoes much too big for him with fancy cloth tops and run-over heels; around his neck was wound a white cotton cloth, hideously soiled, suggesting that he had had a sore throat weeks before. His face—close-set sharp black eyes; longish nose; lips suggesting the beak of a predatory bird; was all lighted up by that all-knowing, zestful leer. A wicked, dirty, comely face; it was the zest expressed there that dishonored Wilfred.

Without turning around, the boy with a slight derisive cock of his head conveyed an invitation to Wilfred to join the circle. Wilfred, gasping, hastened by with lowered head, a hot tide pouring up and scorching his cheeks and forehead. The boy's mocking laughter pursued him.

“Hey, wait a minute, Kid!”

Wilfred darted around the corner.

He made his way home with head down, averting his sight from the sordid streets, and the disgusting beings that frequented them. He knew of course that the change was in himself. He had lost his talisman in the mud. He felt sodden. What's the use? he asked himself in the last bitterness of spirit; I can't climb a little way out of the muck, but my foul nature drags me back again. I am the same as that rotten boy. He saw it. . . . Oh God! if I could only forget the look of that boy!

## II

THE circle of boys in the corner by the Family Entrance broke up. Joe Kaplan, the biggest boy, cuffed and booted smaller ones aside, and walked off towards Rivington street, indifferent to what became of the others. He slapped the flagstones with his spreading shoes, and whistled between his teeth. He was feeling good. A recollection of the white-faced boy flitted across his mind, buoying him up with scorn. Kid from up-town, he thought, sneakin' around lookin' for somepin bad. Gee! what rotten minds them kids has! But Joe could not put this kid out of his mind right away. What made him look at me so funny? he asked himself.

At the Rivington street corner Joe lounged against a pillar with his shoulders hunched forward, making a stupid, sleepy look come in his face. Under his drooping eyelids gleamed a spark. This was his hunting ground. Every little stir in the crowd had its meaning for him. He marked the cop on the sidewalk to the left, leaning back with his elbows propped on a rail, surveying the crowd with good-humored contempt. Hogan; nothing to fear from him; a fat-head, always looking at the women. On the corner in the

other direction was Mitchell; a terror if you tried to turn a trick on the storekeepers; but he despised the pushcart men; all the cops did. However, Joe had heard that the pushcart thefts had made so much talk, the captain of the precinct had sent out a couple of plain-clothes men to mix with the crowd. He was looking for them.

Taking to the middle of the street, Joe shambled up to the corner and back, making out to be a low-down poor mutt, searching under the pushcarts for butts. Joe could let his mouth hang open, and a sort of film come over his eyes; you would swear he was half-crazed with drugged cigarettes. His tour assured him there was no plain-clothes men in that block. He could smell a cop out. He gradually narrowed his beat to and fro, his objective being the pushcart that was selling furs. Cold weather was coming on, and it was doing a brisk trade.

Suddenly Joe perceived a thin-faced lad older than himself, standing about with a cagey eye. Bent upon the same business as himself of course. Joe grinned inwardly. He ain't as smart as me, he thought. Watch me make him work for me. Joe's only regret was, that there was nobody to see how clever he was. He unobtrusively fell back to the curb opposite the cart of furs, where he appeared to be looking at everything in sight except the thin-faced lad.

This one edged up to the pushcart from behind. Occasionally he turned a white face over his shoulder with a faraway look. Clumsy work! thought Joe; if there was a cop within a hundred feet he'd get on to his face. The pushcart had a rack about three feet high built around three sides of it, the better to display its wares. This rack was lined with canvas; but the canvas, as Joe could see, was not securely fastened at the bottom. The canvas-covered rack concealed the thin-faced lad from the proprietor of the cart, who was in front.

When he saw the thin-faced lad throw away his cigarette, Joe crossed the road. The lad was watching the proprietor around the edge of the screen, and did not see Joe. Joe went around the opposite end of the cart, and stood, making his eyes goggle at the grand display of furs. In this position he could no longer see the thin-faced lad, but he saw what he was waiting for; the piece of fur disappear under the canvas with a jerk. Others saw it too, and cries were raised. Some took after the thief. Every eye was turned in that direction. The distracted proprietor flung himself over his stock with arms outspread.

Everybody was looking the other way! What a snap! Joe slipped his hand under the canvas at his end of the cart, and jerked a fur neckpiece out. Fur makes no sound. Nobody got on to him, and a second piece followed the

first. Thrusting his prizes under his coat, he walked off, whistling between his teeth. Oh, I'm smart! I'm smart! I'm smart! he thought upon a swelling breast. The foretaste of a big meal made his mouth water.

Having disposed of his loot in the back room of a little dry goods store where he was known, Joe proceeded to a restaurant on Canal street. This was no hash house, but a regular bon-ton restaurant, with cloths on the tables, and waiters that didn't dast give the customers no lip, so's they had the price. Here you could get a big T-bone steak and coffee for thirty cents, with French fried and bread thrown in, and all the ketchup you wanted. Joe went in feeling big; it wasn't often a kid of his age had the nerve to enter *that* joint.

Half an hour later he leaned back and picked his teeth. He felt out o' sight inside. He *liked* that joint; in the middle of the night it was always warm and bright, and had a stir of life about it. You could hear the meat frying at the back, and smell the smoke of it. There were two men sitting opposite to each other, leaning forward until their heads almost touched, and whispering, whispering, each one rapidly stirring his coffee without ever looking toward the cup. Planning some job all right, thought Joe; bet they ain't as smart as me, though. You can see they're nervous. Across from the men sat a girl who was vainly trying to attract their attention. She was beginning to look bedraggled, and there was a look of terror in the bottom of her eyes that excited Joe's scorn. She was on the toboggan all right. Been kicked out of the houses. A man would be a fool to take her.

His breast twanged with exultation. He was a smart feller; he was all there, you bet. A feller could have a good time in this world if he was smart enough. Everything waitin' to be picked up. No danger of *him* gettin' pinched. He was just a little too smart for them. Gee! it was great to bat around at night, and sleep in the day when the thick-heads was workin'! Let the thick-heads work! There was plenty of them. Workin' never got you nowhere. Look at his old man. . . . Soon as he was old enough he'd have a woman to work for him. Funny how women would work for a man. Soft. Oh well, he'd have one of the best. When he wanted anything, he went out and got it. That was the sort of feller he was. He was smarter than anybody.

Joe went home by way of Allen street where the houses were. After midnight when the East side generally was beginning to quiet down, Allen street was in full swing. Joe never tired of watching the game that was played there. The men looked so sheepish when they sneaked into the houses, and more so when they came out later, cleaned out. Each man looking as if he was the first who had been trimmed. These were the poor fools who hadn't spunk enough to get a woman for themselves. The painted-

up girls too, at the windows, grinning at the men like cats, and making goo-goo eyes, and calling pet names to get them to come in. And the poor suckers fell for it! It was enough to make a feller laugh. Besides, there was often a good trick to be worked in Allen street. If you could get hold of a souse before he fell into the hands of the girls.

On this night Joe had the fun of seeing Chicago Liz's house raided by the police. He had heard rumors that Liz was having trouble with the Captain along of her payments. The police didn't bother the other houses of course, and all the girls were at the windows and doors watching. It was good sport to see Chicago Liz's girls carried out into the street in their short dresses; yelling and carrying on, and joshing the crowd until they were shoved in the wagon. The Madame herself, who looked sour, was taken away with a policeman to herself in a two horse cab.

After it was over, Joe was beckoned by a girl standing in a doorway across the street. This was Jewel La Count who was in Clara Moore's house. Joe had a sort of footing in that house as occasional errand boy. Jewel was half Italian like himself; but nobody knew what the other half of her was. They were about the same age, but Jewel tried to put it over him because she had been going with men for more than a year. Joe sneered at her, but these girls were often useful to him, and he went across the street. A certain uneasiness attacked him at the thought of speaking to her alone. Kid though she was, he wasn't sure how to handle her; he hadn't discovered any way of getting her going.

"What yeh want?" he asked gruffly.

Jewel's great brown eyes took him in unsmilingly, and turned away. "Nottin'," she said. "There's nottin' doin' to-night. I just wanted somebody to talk to."

Joe felt at a loss. "Aah!" he said, kicking the step with his spreading shoe.

"Tell me somepin, Kid," said Jewel. "I never get out."

"Aah!" said Joe. He sized her up calculatingly out of the corners of his eyes. She was a damn pretty girl. But that meant nothing to him. Her skin was as soft and smooth as a baby's. The prettiest girl in the street. He had heard said that Clara Moore knew what a good thing she had in Jewel, and took good care of her. "Where's the Madam?" he asked.

"Out," said Jewel indifferently.

"You'd catch hell if she saw you down in the street."

"I ain't lookin' for anything. The house is closed to-night."



A silence fell between them. Joe wished himself away from there. Jewel made him feel small. He whistled between his teeth, and cursed. “——! but it’s slow in the street to-night. Why the hell couldn’t Liz pay up and let business go on.”

Jewel ignored this as if it had not been spoken. That was the way she was, thought Joe sorely, independent. Stealing a look at her, he was struck by the calm rise and fall of her breast under the pretty waist. She was healthy all right. Well, she lived soft; nothing to do but eat and sleep.

“I like to talk to somebody on the outside,” said Jewel. “In this house it’s always the same. . . . I like to talk.”

“Well, you got plenty company,” said Joe with a knowing grin.

“Aah! I don’t talk to them,” said Jewel coolly. “They don’t ac’ human. I like young kids better. Seems like boys went dotty when they got to be men.”

Joe knew what she meant, but he wasn’t going to let anything on to a girl. “Aah! you’re a bit too big for your shoes,” he said loftily.

It made no impression on her. “I like the streets,” she said dreamily. “I wisht I could roam the streets with a gang of kids. That’s what I’d like.”

“You don’t know when you’re well off,” said Joe.

“Where you been to-night?” asked Jewel.

“To the Bowery Mission,” said Joe derisively.

“Yeah,” said Jewel. “You look it!”

Joe laughed, and felt more at his ease. After all, there was something about Jewel. . . . She didn’t talk with a sponge in her mouth like other girls. She gave it to you straight. “I had a steak at Dolan’s,” he said offhand.

“Yes, you did!” said Jewel. “Where’d you git the price?”

“Oh, I hooked a coupla cat-skins offen a pushcart.”

“Were you chased?” asked Jewel eagerly.

“Nah! What d’ye think I am?”

Jewel paid no attention to the question. Her thoughts pursued their own course.

“Come on up,” she said in friendly fashion.

Joe went hot and cold. At first he didn’t know what to say.

“I got a pack of cigarettes in my room,” the girl went on; “we’ll smoke and chin. I’ll mend your coat for you.”

“Clara’d give me hell if she come home,” said Joe. He heard the little quaver in his own voice and it made him sore. A hard nut like him!

“Oh, Clara wouldn’t mind you,” said Jewel, coolly.

This stung.

“You often been in before,” said Jewel.

This was true, and why shouldn’t he go now? But something inside him trembled.

“Come on,” Jewel went on; “I’ll show you all my things. I got real nice things of my own. I keep ’em locked in my drawer. I’d like to show ’em to somebody. I got a big doll that I dressed myself. She looks real cunning. I got a set of dishes from Chinatown. I got a solid silver photograph frame. . . .”

“Who’s in it?” asked Joe with a curling lip.

“President Cleveland,” said Jewel undisturbed. “Come on up. We’ll talk. You could come often. I’d like to have somebody come to see me, that belonged to me like. . . .”

Joe felt that he must play the man. “Nottin’ doin’ to-night, girly,” he said, as he had heard men say along Allen street.

Jewel looked at him with her big, calm eyes. Then she laughed. She planted her hands on her hips, and opened her mouth wide to let it come out.

“Aah!” snarled Joe. “Aah . . . !” Her laughter stung him like whips. If she had said anything, he could have got back at her, but she laughed what was in her mind, and there was no answer to that. She wasn’t just trying to get back at him; she really thought he was as funny as hell. “Aah!” snarled Joe, “I’m not afraid of you!”

She laughed afresh, and by that he knew that she knew that he *was* afraid of her. “Aah! to hell with you!” snarled Joe, grinding his teeth.

He walked off followed by the sound of her laughter.

The Kaplans lived in two rooms on Sussex street. Joe banged the door open noisily. Here was a place where he could make himself felt. Though it was past midnight his father and mother were still sewing pants on the two sewing machines, side by side against the wall between the cook-stove and the front windows. Their bowed backs were to Joe as he entered. On a chair between the two narrow windows sat a girl of eleven asleep, her head fallen back against the wall, her white, unchildlike face turned up to the gaslight; mouth open. The pair of pants she had been sewing on, had slipped to the floor. On a broken, carpet-covered sofa against the left-hand wall, lay two little boys sleeping in their clothes; the outer one clinging to his brother to keep from rolling off. The dining table with the remains of the last meal

upon it, was shoved into the back corner of the room. Pants in various stages of completion were piled everywhere.

“Well, this is a hell of a dump to come back to!” said Joe in a rasping voice.

At the sound of his voice, the two little boys rolled off the sofa, and creeping on hands and knees to the only unoccupied corner, curled up in a fresh embrace, and instantly fell asleep again. It pleased Joe to see how quickly they moved. His mother rose heavily from her machine, and threw a ragged piece of quilt over the boys. She shook the girl by the shoulder, and led her staggering into the back room, where the child collapsed on a mattress spread on the floor.

Joe sat down on the vacated sofa, and commenced to take off his shoes. His eyes roved around the place full of contempt. There was both a window and a door into the back room, which had no other openings. It was not much larger than a closet; the bed and the narrow mattress thrown down beside it, filled the floor space. From lines stretched across between wall and wall hung whatever of the family wardrobe was not in use. The walls were painted blue.

“God! what a home for a fellow!” said Joe.

Nobody paid any attention. His mother plodded back to her machine without looking at him. His father never had stopped working the treadles. Joe looked from one to another in a rage. Nice pair of broken-down mutts they were! Was this the best they could do for him? Did they think a fellow was going to stand for it? His mother was a strong, healthy woman, but dead from the neck up; dazed-like; dumb. She took everything that came. It was almost impossible to get her going. His father—Joe grinned; you could always get *him* by the short hairs. Joe gloated over the humbled back. His father was askeared of him, all right! Yah! the skinny Jew with his ashy face and sore eyes! His grey hair was coming out in spots like a mangy dog’s. The tufts that remained curled in ringlets with the bald spots showing through. His beard too. Spit-curls!

“How the hell do you expect me to sleep in this racket?” snarled Joe.

“This lot is promised in the morning,” said his mother in a dead voice.

“What’s that to me? I gotta have my sleep.”

“Take my place on the bed,” she said.

“What! sleep wit’ *him*,” said Joe indicating his father. “Not on your tin-type. I’m more particular, *I* am.”

The woman shrugged, and went on with her sewing.

“On the level,” said Joe, undressing, “is he my fat’er?”

“You shut your mouth,” she said, without looking around.

“Honest, I can’t believe that bag o’ bones ever made me,” drawled Joe. “I ain’t like him. It beats me, Mom, how you could a’ done it!”

The two machines whirred on, with only the necessary pauses to turn the goods.

Joe raised his voice a little to make sure of being heard above the sound. “But its a cinch some Jew made me. I got Jew blood all right, and I’m glad of it. The Jews are a smart people. . . . All except him. He’s a botched Jew; a scarecrow; he’s a Jew that didn’t come off. He must a been made of the stale bits like that twice-baked cake yeh git such a big hunk of for a penny, but at that it would make you puke to eat it. . . .”

Joe’s father suddenly rose, and turning round, supported himself against the back of his chair with a wasted, shaking arm. Joe, with a grin, watched how the sparse curls of his beard seemed to stiffen and quiver. “You bad boy . . . you bad boy!” he said in a husky broken voice. The old geezer’s lungs were rotten. “You are my son, God help me! When you were placed in my hands I gave thanks to God for my first-born. Little did I think it was a curse He was laying upon me!”

The old man straightened up, and shook his scraggy arms above his head. Good as a t’eyter, thought Joe. “Oh God! what have I done to deserve such a son!” he croaked. “I have worked hard all my days, and have wronged no man!” He waved his sticks of arms about. “Look! Look! How we live; how we work! We are sick and starving. And he comes in from the streets, the loafer! greasy with good food, and twits me to my beard! . . . God has abandoned me! God has abandoned me! . . .” Straining back his head like a man struggling for air, the old man staggered into the back room. They heard him fall, a dead weight on the bed.

Joe laughed loudly. “Well, if I’m a hell of a son, you’re a hell of a father,” he called after him. “What did you ever do for me?” He pulled an old coverlet from under the sofa, and wrapped himself up in it, laughing. “Gee! it’s rich when the old man begins to call on God!” he said. “That’s the Jew of it! And him kicked out of the synagogue, like you was kicked out of the church! This is a swell religious family, this is!”

His mother did not answer him. She kept her broad back turned to him. Joe saw her glance over at the other machine to measure how much work the man had left undone. Then her head went a little lower, as she made the treadles of her machine move faster. Joe, feeling better now, flung an arm over his eyes to shield them from the gaslight; and settled himself to sleep.

### III

TOWARDS evening Joe Kaplan and two boys smaller than himself were making their way down Fifth Avenue. They had started out in the morning five strong, but two of the kids had been lost somewhere. They had spent the day in Central Park where they had seen the m'nag'rie, and the swan boats and the rich kids riding in goat carriages on the Mall. Of the latter Pat Crear had said: "Gawd! all dressed up in velvet and lace like doll babies, and strapped down in them little wagons so's they can't fall out; it's a wonder they don't get heart disease from the excitement." In order to find out if he was human, Pat had given the long curls of one little boy a sharp tweak, and cut whooping across the grass to the shrubbery.

They had had the luck to come across a boy selling lozenges in an out of the way spot. They had swiped his box offen him, and after sampling some of each flavor, had sold the rest in another part of the park, thus providing the means for a more substantial feed. Afterwards they had wandered away up to Harlem mere, and had lost themselves in the woods up there. They built a fire, and made out they were hoboies, and Tony Lipper had killed a squirrel with a stone. No kid he knew had ever done that before, and he was bringing it home in his pocket to prove it.

On Fifth Avenue the elegant carriages rolled up and down, each drawn by a pair of glossy horses stepping high, and each driven by one or two men sitting up in front without moving, like the tin men on pavement toys. On the sidewalk the tony guys were walking up and down, many of the Johnnies wearing silk ties and swinging sticks, the dames with sleeves as big as hams and little tails to their jackets sticking up like a chippie's. Joe and the other boys were pleased by the sense of their incongruity in that company, and they accentuated it by slapping the pavement with their broken shoes, spitting to the right and left, and talking rough. They felt great when they succeeded in attracting the scowls and the disgusted looks of the passers-by; or when a lady daintily drew her skirts aside to avoid contact.

"Dare me to spit on the next one?" said Pat.

"If you do some Johnnie will crack yeh over the coco wit' his stick," said Joe indifferently. "But yeh kin show yeh don't give a damn for them by makin' snoots. They can't do nottin' to yeh for that."

They came to two great square houses built of brownstone and joined together in the middle by a bone like the Siamese twins, so imposing that Pat was led to ask:

"What the hell buildings is them?"

“The Vanderbilts live there,” said Joe. “They’s the richest guys in the world.”

“On’y one family in the whole goddam house?” said Pat. “Gee! it must be lonely for them.”

They were not especially interested in this high-toned world; it didn’t touch them anywhere. It was different though, when they caught sight of a quartette of tough kids like themselves, moseying along on the other side of the way looking innocent. Joe and his two instinctively sought cover behind the swell guys, whence they watched the enemy warily.

“All harps,” said Joe. “Likely they belong to the Hell’s Kitchen gang over by the North river. Say, that’s the worst neighborhood in town. They’s a coupla murders done there ev’y day.”

“What they doin’ on Fift’ Avenoo?” asked Tony fearfully.

“Same as yourself,” said Joe with scorn. “If you was to go over on the West side you’d get moralized by the Hell’s Kitcheners, wouldn’t yeh? And the same on the East side by the Gas house gang or the Turtle Bays. But you’re safe on Fift’ Avenoo ain’t yeh? All the fellas goes up Fift’ Avenoo cos that’s neutral ground, see?”

“They’s some bad gangs up-town, too,” Joe went on. “The Hundredth street gang, and the Hundred and Tenth. I’ve heard tell how the Hundred and Tenth Streeters come down Amsterdam Avenue by Bloomingdale Asylum, spread across the street from curb to curb like skirmishers, and carryin’ all before them. They’s on’y a few cops up there.”

The Hell’s Kitcheners passed out of sight, and were forgotten.

“Say, Joe,” asked Pat, “why don’t you never go with the East Houston street gang or the Delancey Streeters?”

“Aah!” said Joe, “that’s childish to me, all that fightin’ for nottin’. I play my own hand, see? When I go out, I go for somepin for myself.”

“You go wit’ us?”

“You go wit’ me, you mean. I ain’t no objection to havin’ a coupla little suckers along to do what I tell ’em.”

When they reached Thirty-Fourth street it was growing dark, and they cut through to Broadway where there was more life after nightfall. To the smaller boys it seemed as if the people were dressed sweller over here, but Joe said they were not so high-toned as the Avenue gang. The women were mostly high-priced tarts, he said. Every block had its theatre; the Standard, the Bijou, Palmer’s, Daly’s, the Imperial and the Fifth Avenue. The Twenty-

Eighth street crossing appeared to be the busiest and brightest spot, and here they took up their stand.

“Lookit,” said Joe, “you two want to sit on that grating, see? as if you was cold and was after the warm air comin’ up. You want to sit on the front edge, see, so’s when anybody pitches you a nickel it won’t go through the grating, see? You don’t have to do nottin’ but look poor the way I showed yeh, and shiver, and squeeze up close for warmth. Pat looks t’ best wit’ his fat’er’s coat on. Tony, if you let me tear your pants a little more so’s the skin would show. . . .”

“Nottin’ doin’! It’s the on’y pair I got.”

“Oh, to hell wit’ it, then. You keep a little behind Pat. For God’s sake don’t ast for anything, or hold out your hand, or you’ll give the whole snap away. You don’t want to even look at the people. Look down on the ground as if you was all in wit’ t’ hunger and cold, see? And don’t forget to look surprised ev’y time you get a penny.”

Joe retired down the side street. Occasionally he strolled past the huddling pair on the grating, surveying them out of the corner of his eye with pride in the effect. Pennies and nickels fell at their feet. In fact they were too successful, the ring of the coins on the flagstones reached the sharp ears of the blind woman who sold matches at the door of the Fifth Avenue Theatre adjoining. She came out in a rage, furiously tapping; a fearsome figure with her big bonnet, her blue glasses, her voluminous petticoats. Lashing out with her stick, she drove the boys away with frightful curses.

“Gawd! what langwidge from a woman!” said Pat, a little awestruck, when they collected their forces, down near Sixth Avenue.

However, they had already taken seventy cents. Joe took the money, but laid out a part of it on a big feed of frankfurters, bolivars, and sarsaparilla on Sixth. They filled their pockets with cigarettes. They felt fine.

They drifted up-town again. Later they found themselves outside a big new theatre by Fortieth street, called the Empire. They loitered on the pavement just out of reach of the carriage man, watching the four-wheelers and the hansoms trundle up and discharge their passengers. There was one or two of these here horseless carriages among them, which came drifting up to the curb as quietly as boats, the driver perched up behind, steering with a handle. From all the vehicles ladies descended, pointing a satin slipper to the ground. They wore velvet cloaks, red, green or white, and no hats, which was strange, since they were not poor women. The men wore big black capes; they had hats, tall ones, and it was the boys’ chief interest to get a vantage point where they could see the men press their hats against their

hips as they walked through the lobby, and smash them flat. A remarkable sight, which caused them to laugh uproariously.

The stream of arrivals at the theatre door had about ceased, when two Johnnies came along through Fortieth street, and paused, grinning at the three boys. Joe was familiar with that grin. Young fellows who fancied themselves, like to sass a street boy, and if you answered them back smart, but not smart enough to put them out of face, very often there was a dime in it, or a quarter if the fellow had an edge on. But these two were not the real thing, Joe perceived; counter-jumpers. One of them had two blue admission checks in his hand, and he said to his friend: "Let's give 'em to the little fellers."

Joe, with a meek expression, instantly effaced himself. The other two, not deceived by this maneuver, watched him anxiously. Joe strolled off to the gallery door of the Empire, from which the two Johnnies must have just issued. Presently Pat and Tony approached, each nipping a blue ticket between his fingers. They stopped to consult in whispers. They crossed the street, and stood kicking a hydrant and looking at Joe. Joe looked up and down the street. Suddenly the two set off towards Sixth avenue on the run. Joe was not to be drawn off. They came back on his side of the street, each one trying to persuade the other to go first. Then they decided to rush the theatre door together. Joe was not confused by these tactics. He had picked out his victim from the beginning. Tony Lipper was the smaller of the two. Joe snatched the check out of Tony's hand, and started up the stone stairway with Pat beside him. As soon as Tony was eliminated, Pat sucked up to Joe.

"That dirty little guinney hadn't oughta go into a swell house like this. His pants is tore."

They found themselves sitting towards the top of a steep bank of seats looking almost straight down into an illuminated well; the stage. The curtain was up. Joe had been to the London and the Thalia, but never to a swell up-town t'eayter. At first he was confused by the play, which was not like a play; it was just ordinary talking. He wondered if it was a custom up-town for the actors to sit around on the stage and talk before the play began. But from the close attention accorded by the audience he judged that this must be the play; a newer, tonier kind of play, he guessed, and applied his mind to it.

Well, the stage represented a room in a very fine house, such a room as Joe had never been in; but he accepted that room; an instinct told him it was the thing. A party was going on; the people were of the sort that Joe had seen entering the theatre. There was a sour-faced woman in a brown silk dress who was making a fuss. She said she was going home because there



was another woman in the house that she didn't like, and the others were all trying to smooth her down. Why the hell didn't they let her go, thought Joe.

There was a lot of talk about this other woman, and Joe's curiosity was excited about her. Then she came in, and the audience clapped; a little thing with a proud nose. She put all the other women in the shade. She wasn't so pretty neither, but there was something about her . . . she just walked in and took the place. Joe was struck by her flashing glance, which could make out anything she wanted, without giving her away. Gee! she's smart! he thought. She knows how to work 'em! She was wearing the prettiest white dress he had ever seen.

"Gee! this is a rotten show!" whispered Pat Crear.

"Well, it didn't cost you nottin'!" said Joe.

"Ain't nottin' to it!"

"Not to an ign'rant little mutt like you."

"Let's go down to Fourteent' street. Somepin doin' there."

"Go ahead."

But Pat would not go alone.

There was a fresh-complected Johnny in the play who was stuck on the little woman with the proud nose, and they were fixing to get married. But all his folks were dead against it; for why, Joe could not understand, since she was certainly the pick of the basket. There was a lot of lahdy-dah talk he didn't understand. He was interested in studying the details of that house, and the looks and manners of its high-toned inmates. He particularly admired the cool way the men handled themselves; lighting their cigars and pouring their drinks. Actin' as if they owned the earth, he thought; and that's the right way to act. It takes the heart out of the poor boobs.

Finally there was a scene in what looked like a book-store; but Joe picked up in the course of the action that it was called library, and all the books belonged to the man who lived in that house. There was a long talk in this room between a big guy who let on he was a lawyer—he was the fresh-complected Johnnie's uncle; and the little woman with the proud nose, who was now wearing a grey dress even sweller than the white one. Bit by bit the lawyer guy broke her down (But not really, because all the time she was crying and carrying on, she was still looking around with that unbeatable eye) and it all came out that she had had a kid, and wasn't married at all. This discovery rather dashed Joe; for he had forgotten that it was a play, but this was just the same as the plays on the Bowery. In real life for a girl to have a kid wasn't nothing. But maybe it was different in high society.

The noisy scene drew Pat Crear's attention back to the stage. When the curtain fell, he said: "Aah! I'd like to paste that fat slob! What he wanta make t' guyl cry fer?"

"Aah, you don't know nottin'," said Joe. "It's on'y a play, like. I don't pay no attention to that."

"You was takin' it all in," said Pat.

Joe's close-set eyes seemed to draw closer together; he gnawed a finger nail, scowling slightly. "I dunno . . ." he muttered. "It set me thinkin', like. . . . It was a chance to see how them rich folks lives inside their houses. They lives nice. Plenty of room to spread themselves. And t' best of ev'yt'ing, see? That's what appeals to me. Soft stuffs like silks and velvets around yeh, and women fixed nice. Servants to ac' humble, and bring yeh ev'yt'ing yeh want. . . ."

"Maybe that was all made up, too," suggested Pat.

"Shut up, you pore ign'rant mutt, and listen to what I'm tellin' yeh! . . . Look at the dirty way our folks live. What do folks call us? gutter-snipes; street ayrabs, and such all. Well, them folks are no better'n we are, on'y they got money, see? Well, I guess they's more money to be got the same way. . . . This is a free country and I'm as good as anybody. . . . You don't git money by wuykin' your heart out, neither. It ain't wuykman as gits rich. It's the smart guys. They wuyk the boobs and suckers. . . . When you git older you begin sizin' things up. I'm near sixteen now. Well, I'm a smart feller. I'm gonna live soft too, and have a servant that I can boot around. . . ."

"They didn't boot their servants."

"Shut up! They could if they wanted to."

"Where you gonna git it?"

"I'll git it all right. I allus gits what I wants. . . . I know what I want now. I want a whole lot of money. . . . First-off I got to make a good appearance. I'll git me a nobby suit and a haircut . . ."

"Chrrrist!" said Pat, grinning derisively. Inside the theatre he knew he was safe.

"Shut up, you mutt!" said Joe, without heat. "A mutt you was born, and a mutt you'll die!"

## IV

**E**AST BROADWAY was the Fifth Avenue of the East Side. A wide street lined, not with tall tenements like the other streets, but with moderate sized brick houses with steep roofs and big chimneys. Nothing grand about them, but solid looking. One family to a house. In these houses lived the smart guys who lived directly off the poor boobs of the East Side: that is to say: doctors, lawyers, politicians, rabbis and prosperous storekeepers. Many of these guys were able to buy up the up-town blokes several times over, it was said, but they made out they lived simple and bragged about being East-Siders; it was good for business. They were smart guys all right, but Joe had no intention of stopping at East Broadway.

He was on his way to report to a lawyer who had hired him to secure evidence against a man, whose wife wanted to get a divorce. Having extended the scope of his operations, Joe had been able to procure himself a whole suit with long pants; also new shoes and a cap. He wore a white celluloid collar which he cleaned with a rag every morning. But he was already dissatisfied with the effect; his suit was beginning to look crummy, because he had no way of getting it cleaned and pressed. He wanted two suits.

The nights were cold now, and the people had retired indoors. While he was still some way off, therefore, Joe's attention was attracted by a little group gathered below one of the old-fashioned stoops. From the way the people on the sidewalk were bending over, he perceived that something was the matter; and hastened forward. Sitting on the bottom step he beheld a funny-looking little woman, her knees as high as her chest, her skirts drawn up high enough to reveal a pair of new button shoes of soft leather, which toed in like a little girl's. She was tenderly feeling of her ankle. Not at all a grand person, yet Joe instantly perceived she was of the up-town world. What a chance! he thought, energetically shouldering aside the women of the neighborhood who were bending over her. They fell back muttering: "Fresh!"

"Are yez hurted, lady?" Joe enquired, making his voice purr.

She lifted a pair of big, foggy grey eyes. "My ankle," she murmured, "I put my foot in a crack, and twisted it badly. . . . I don't know. . . . I'm afraid it's sprained!"

"Send for the ambylance," said a voice.

"Oh, no! no!" said the little woman like a scared child. "I want to go home!"

"Sure!" said Joe. "What you want is a cab."

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Can one get a cab in this neighborhood?"

“I can git you one,” said Joe. “Fella I know. Just around the corner. You wait here.”

He ran around to McArdel’s livery stable in Division street, and gave the order. In three minutes he was back again. The crowd had increased in numbers; he bored his way through it as a matter of right. “S’all right, ma’am. Cab ’ll be here d’rectly.”

She looked up at him half grateful, half afraid of the bold-faced boy.

Joe faced the crowd truculently, his eyes darting from face to face to discover if anybody was inclined to dispute his claim to the woman. Just let them try it, that was all! “Get back, can’t yeh!” he cried roughly. “Can’t yeh give the lady air?”

Out of the corners of his eyes he sized her up. He was excited. What a chance! What a chance! He put aside his errand to the lawyer. He felt a burning desire to learn her, to master the secret of her nature, to envelope her, to turn her to his own uses. She looked easy, with that foggy glance and the childlike droop to the corners of her mouth; but she was of a world that was strange to him; he must make no mistakes. He had not missed the fact that she was half afraid of him; and he set himself to subdue his masterful air before her, and to butter his grating voice.

“Yer all right, Lady. I’ll see yeh troo!”

He cuffed aside the small boys, who came pushing between the legs of the adults to have a look.

Meanwhile he registered every detail of her appearance. She was about fifty years old, but her face was very little wrinkled, and her color was fresh. She looked as if she had been preserved under a thin film of paraffine; even her eyes. There was a strained look in her eyes. She’s scared now; you can’t get her right, thought Joe. Obviously an old maid; likes the soapy stuff, he thought. She wore a long, close-fitting coat of dark green, having many little capes, each edged with grey fur; and a small black hat shaped like a shell clinging to her head.

The cab came rattling and banging around the corner, and the old horse slid to a stand on his shaky legs. The crowd opened a way through for the lady. She surveyed the rusty vehicle, the furry beast that drew it, and the boozy driver on the box in unmixed alarm. The smell of the outfit came clear across the sidewalk.

“S’all right! S’all right!” Joe repeated. “Of course the swellest turnouts was already out, but I know this driver. He’s a safe driver. . . . Stand up on your good leg, lady, and lean on me. . . . Here you, take her other arm.”

Supported on either side, the lady hopped across the sidewalk on one foot. Somehow they got her bundled in. Joe shouldered his helper to one side. Keeping his hand on the handle of the door, he stuck his head inside.

“Where to, Lady?”

“Nineteen West Eleventh street,” she said faintly.

Nineteen; that’s near Fifth avenue; thought Joe with satisfaction. Repeating the number to the driver, he climbed nimbly after the lady, and pulled the door to. The cab jerked into motion.

“Oh!” she gasped from her corner. “You needn’t have come!”

“S’all right,” said Joe. “Don’t cost no more for two than one. You need me to help you out, see? The driver maybe can’t leave his horse stand.”

The old cab lurched and swayed. Talking was well-nigh impossible until they turned into an asphalt paved street. Joe had seldom ridden in a cab, but he had only a side glance of his mind for that experience. He was preoccupied with the little lady, pressing herself into her corner. Frightened, it seemed. He greatly desired to improve his opportunity, but was afraid of queering himself. If he could only make her talk he could get a line on her! Finally he ventured politely:

“You was a long way from home, lady.”

“Thursday nights I teach sewing to working girls in the White Door Settlement,” she said nervously.

“Oh, I see,” said Joe. “Them settlement houses does a lot of good.”

No response. She looked obstinately out of the window.

However “Settlement” had given Joe his line. He had heard all about those Christers who came down from up-town to lift up the poor. “On’y wisht I could go to one,” he said mournfully. “I’m so darn ign’rant.”

She did not rise to it.

Joe persevered. “I got no time for it. I gotta work nights as well as daytimes. . . .”

“What is your work?”

Joe smiled to himself. He had forced her to ask that. “Oh, I got a regular job in the daytime. Nights I sell papers to help out. I got heavy expenses. . . .” He left his sentence teasingly in the air.

“Expenses? A boy like you? . . . Huh? I suppose you mean you have to help out at home?”

Joe felt assured now that he could handle her. He proceeded to spread himself. “Oh, I ain’t got no regular home, like. I just sleep around where I can get the cheapest bed. Summer nights I often sleep in the park to save the

price of a bed. I got a kid brother, you see. I got him boardin' wit' a nice family on East Broadway. I was just comin' from there, when I seen you. Three dollars a week, I pay for him. That's what keeps me hustlin'. . . . Besides his clo'es and all. . . ."

The lady came partly out of her corner. She was interested. "Why . . ." she said. "What stories one hears! . . . I don't know. . . . It seems terrible. . . . Huh? Have you no father and mother?"

"Dead, ma'am," said Joe, sadly. "My old man, he was killed in a boiler explosion; and me mutter, she just wasted away, like, after."

"Oh, dear!" she said. "And the whole burden fell on you! . . . Huh? . . . You poor boy!"

"Oh, I don't mind, ma'am," said Joe quickly. "I'm a bugger for work. . . . He's a real cute little feller. . . ."

"How old?"

"Nine."

"What's his name?"

"Malcolm, 'm."

There was no lack of conversation during the rest of the drive.

When they drew up at the address given, Joe perceived to his satisfaction that it was a fine neighborhood; quiet and genteel. Number Nineteen was one of three houses in a row; smaller than their neighbors, but having a neat, choice look. The red bricks were set off with a white wood trim; there were elegant lace curtains in the windows.

Between them Joe and the cabman helped the lady up the steps. The outer door of the house was closed. In response to their ring, it was presently opened by another little lady, very like the first, but having a more sensible look. Joe was relieved; a man might have been difficult to deal with.

The lady at the door gasped in dismay. Joe's lady pretended to make out that it was nothing at all, but all the time she was letting on that she was real bad off. This one had such a funny way of talking. She couldn't say anything right through, but always run out of breath in the middle, and fetched a little gasp. Huh? Very often she ended up with something quite different from the beginning. An Irish maid came, and all three talked at once, or made clucking noises. A houseful of women; what luck! thought Joe.

The sister and the maid received the sufferer from the hands of Joe and the cabman. To the cabman Joe said out of the corner of his mouth: "You've got your pay; cheese it!" The man went down the steps. Joe himself insinuated his body inside the door, and closed it. He made himself

inconspicuous in the dark vestibule. The two women were making their way towards the stairs, supporting the sufferer between them. Intent upon her, they paid no attention to Joe.

The strong servant picked up her mistress bodily, and started up the stairs. The other lady followed with her arms outstretched as if she expected them to fall over backwards, and clucking all the way. Joe entered the house, softly closing the inner door, and eagerly looked around him. His first feeling was one of disappointment; the carpet was worn. Still . . . the place was fixed up real nice; nothing grand, of course.

The gas was burning inside a fancy red lantern; there was a funny carved oak hat-stand with brass hooks; and on the other side of it a table with a silver plate on it, full of cards with people's names on them. Joe took note of how the stair carpet was fastened down by a brass rail running across each step. That was a neat rig, now. The door into the parlor at his right hand, was open, but that room was dark. However, enough light came in from the street to show him that it was a real nice room, crowded with pretty fixings.

Hearing a stir overhead, Joe hastily smoothed his hair down with his hands, and sat down in the hall with a Christly expression. The sister of the hurt lady came tripping down the stairs at a great rate. She had a worried look; evidently it had just occurred to her that Joe had not been disposed of. She saw him and stopped on the stairs. "Oh!" she said. She was a little older than her sister, yet somehow had a fresher look. But not a woman who was accustomed to dealing with men. She had a smooth oval face, and pretty sloping shoulders like a girl.

"I brought her home," said Joe, modestly, to help her out.

"Oh, yes! Of course!" she said. "Just wait a moment till I fetch my purse."

"No, lady, no," said Joe. "I don't want nottin' off yeh. I was just waitin' to hear if your sister was bad hurted. I t'ought maybe I could run for the doctor."

"Oh!" said the lady. She came slowly down the rest of the stairs. She was looking at Joe with little wrinkles in her forehead. Joe could read her thoughts. He had put her in the wrong by refusing the tip she had offered him. Now she didn't know what to do with him. She didn't like him, but she felt that she ought to like such a true-hearted lad as he was making out to be. Well, Joe didn't care whether she liked him or not, so he could make her do what he wanted.

"Shall I go for the doctor?" he asked.

“Oh, no!” she said, recollecting herself. “It is not serious. It has happened before, and I know just what to do.”

“Then I’ll be stepping,” said Joe. He lingered, allowing his glance to travel wistfully around the pleasant interior.

“I’m sure we both thank you,” said the lady uneasily. “I wish. . . .”

Joe looked up encouragingly, but she didn’t go on.

“We both thank you very much indeed!”

“Don’t mention it, ma’am,” said Joe. “. . . My name is Joseph Kaplan,” he added suggestively, and lingered still.

“Yes?” she said with a strained smile.

She became very uncomfortable, but Joe couldn’t get her over the sticking point. There was nothing more he could do without showing his hand. He thought: Oh, well, I can come back to ask how the other one is getting on. He said softly:

“Good-night, lady,” and with a wistful glance in her face, let himself out of the door.

She was left standing in the hall looking unhappy. As soon as he was gone, she could not understand how she could have shown such a lack of proper feeling toward that poor boy. She wanted to call him back.

## V

“**T**HE sight of so much sin and suffering . . .” said the lady with the sprained ankle. “Hum; there were fleas in that cab. . . . I don’t know; they don’t seem to realize! . . . Huh? And the most of it falls on the innocent!”

“If they was more like you we’d be a hull lot better off,” said Joe.

“Not like me, Joe, no! . . . That horse ought to have been reported to the S.P.C.A. Oh, dear! There are so many things one ought to . . . Joe, you should say: ‘If there were more’—if you don’t mind my telling you. . . . Huh? . . .”

“No’m. I’m crazy to learn. Ain’t had no chances. If there were more like you. . . .”

“No, Joe! . . . I’m sure it had some terrible disease . . . I’m but a poor weak vessel! One night a week . . . Huh? The air is so bad! . . . Yes; if I was made of sterner stuff I would give up everything I possess and . . . I don’t know. . . .”



“If you gave away ev’yt’ing, ’m, you wouldn’t have nottin’ to give to the poor.”

“Oh, I don’t believe in . . . Huh? You must practice your th’s. Like this: ‘Everything; nothing.’ Huh? . . . It is yourself that you must give. . . . They don’t seem to appreciate. . . .”

They were sitting in the parlor of the little house on West Eleventh street—only they called it drawing-room, Joe had learned. The little lady was seated on a sofa by the window, with her injured foot on a stool before her; a silk scarf thrown over her ankle. It was after five on Sunday afternoon, and the servant had just lighted a tall lamp which stood beside the old-fashioned piano at the back of the room. The lamp had a very large shade made of yellow crinkled paper, which spread an agreeable glow around. It was like a play.

Joe, his hair well slicked down, had the air of being established in the house, and he knew it. He kept his eyes lowered so as not to betray his satisfaction. Handling the old maid was as easy as eating pie. She could take any amount of soft sawder. On a stand beside the sofa was a vase containing three damaged pink roses, wired to their stems. Every now and then she glanced at them with a softened look. The other sister was in and out of the room. The one was called Miss May Gittings; the other, Mrs. Fanny Boardman.

Miss Gittings continued, her hazy grey eyes shining on something far away: “Sympathy; understanding; encouragement; that is the message I try to . . . Huh? And plain sewing . . . oh, dear! they seem to have no womanly feeling for the needle. . . . The worst of misfortune is, it breeds a callous spirit. . . . I don’t know. . . . When they jeer at me I tell myself it is but the anguish of their souls peeping out. Every Thursday I find it harder and harder to work myself up to . . . Ah, yes! . . . Poor dear girls. . . . Huh? . . .”

“If I was there, I’d learn them!” said Joe doubling his fist.

“Oh, Joe! you wouldn’t hit a girl . . . !”

“Of course I wouldn’t *hit* them,” he said quickly. “But I’d give ’em a good layin’ out.”

“No, you can’t do away with poverty!” said Miss Gittings. “There’s one or two of them *would* be the better for a good whipping. . . . Huh? . . . The great thing is to teach the poor to be more spiritual-minded. . . . They chew gum with their mouths open. They know it annoys me. . . . Huh? . . . So they can trample on the ills of the flesh. We are all equal sharers in the things of the spirit. . . . And I know some of them smoke cigarettes. . . . Huh?”

“You talk beautiful,” murmured Joe.

“I can talk to you. You’re the first poor person that ever understood me. . . . Huh? . . . You’re only a boy, but you’ve been through the fire. . . . You should say: ‘Talk beautifully’. . . . And your spirit is refined like. . . . Huh? . . . whatever shortcomings your exterior . . . but that’s not your fault. . . .”

Mrs. Boardman was a more practical-minded person than her sister—but not much more. She had an easy-going sensible look. She had been married only three months, and that twenty years ago, Joe had learned, but the experience, brief as it was, apparently enabled her to keep her feet on the ground, while the sister, who had never known a man, pursued her batlike flights through the air. But a funny thing was, as Joe was quick to see, the batty one was the leading spirit of the two. Apparently there was more force in her notions than in the other’s commonsense. Mrs. Boardman followed contentedly wherever Miss Gittings led. Therefore, if you made yourself solid with the old maid, you would be all right with the widow.

“Don’t you spend your Sunday afternoons with Everard, Joe?” asked Miss Gittings. “You might bring . . . Huh? . . . Is he a very destructive child?”

“No ’m. You mean Malcolm. I t’ought I hadn’t oughta keep him outa Sunday School, like.”

“You mustn’t run your words together. . . . Of course; quite right. . . . Say that sentence again, slowly.”

Joe obeyed very willingly. This was useful.

“Don’t you go to Sunday School, Joe?” asked Mrs. Boardman.

“I’ll tell you the troot . . . truth, ’m, I ain’t got the face. I’m so ignorant, they’d put me amongst the littlest kids.”

“But if Malcolm is only nine, you must have been at least six or seven when your mother died. Didn’t she give you any religious instruction?”

“Yes’m,” said Joe vaguely. “. . . She was a good woman.”

“Do you remember her clearly?”

“Yes’m, I kin see her now!”

Miss Gittings exchanged a look with her sister. “But Fanny, that is psychic!” she said, opening her eyes.

Joe had no idea what the funny-sounding word meant. Evidently it was a word which excited them. He waited with stretched ears for some clue to its meaning.

“Do you mean that merely in a manner of speaking,” asked Mrs. Boardman of Joe; “or do you mean you can actually see her as if she were a living person?”

Joe had no doubt of the answer required to this question. “I kin see her just as plain as I see you ’m.” He closed his eyes, and went on: “She was a tall woman and she gen’ally wore a grey dress, real full in the skirt. She had real black hair, parted in the middle, and brushed down flat, and she wore a little gold cross hangin’ round her neck, and a gold ring on her finger. We wasn’t so poor then.”

“An authentic spirit portrait. . . . Huh? . . .” murmured Miss Gittings to her sister. “Tell me,” she asked Joe in some excitement, “under what circumstances does she usually . . . Huh? . . . how? when? where?”

“Oh, she comes most any time,” said Joe, “but gen’ally at night. She shows brighter in the dark, seems like.”

“What a spirit touch!” murmured the sisters.

“She most allus comes when I’m feelin’ bad,” Joe went on. “When I ain’t had no supper; or when I gotta sleep on a park bench. Then I see her beside me, bendin’ over. She puts her hand on my wrist. . . .”

“Can you *feel* her hand?” demanded Miss Gittings breathlessly. “This is important. . . . Huh?”

“Surest thing you know ’m! Just like this!” Joe grasped his own wrist.

“How truly remarkable!”

“And she says: ‘Fight the good fight, Joe!’ Or: ‘Stick it out, son; your mutter is watchin’ you.’ Or somepin like that. Then I feel all right again.”

“A genuine psychic!” murmured Miss Gittings breathlessly. “. . . Huh? . . . This rude, uninstructed . . . The veriest sceptic must be . . . Oh, sister! . . . Tell us more,” she said to Joe, “my sister and I are extremely interested in such phenomena. We ourselves . . . go on! go on!”

By this time, of course, Joe had grasped the sense of the funny-sounding word. Spirits! Well, he could feed ’em as much as they’d take. “Wuncet,” he resumed solemnly, “things was real bad with me. Malcolm was sick, and had to have the doctor, and the folks he lives with was after me for the two dollars to pay him; and I didn’t have it; and I didn’t dast go to see how he was, wit’out it; and I was near crazy, you bet! And I happened to be goin’ troo Rivington street where the pushcart market is, and they was all kinds of things on the pushcarts that a feller could pick up; hats and fur-pieces and women’s jackets and all; and I made up my mind to snatch a baby’s jacket for Malcolm’s sake. . . .”

“But what could you have done with that?”

“Oh, there’s places you kin sell them things. There’s plenty bad fellers on the East Side makes a business of it, and they’re allus askin’ yeh to go in wit’ ’em. But I don’t have no truck wit’ ’em.”

“Go on!” said both sisters together.

“Well, while I was standin’ there waitin’ for the man to turn his back so’s I could prig the jacket, all of a sudden I seen me mutter beside me. She didn’t say nottin’ that time, but she looked real bad. She just took aholt of me and pulled me away from the pushcart. She pulled me around the corner into Ridge street, and down the hill to the church there, and inside the church. It was all dark awmost, except the candles on the altar. And she took holy water, and put it on me—honest, I could feel the very drops! and she made me kneel down beside her, and she prayed to God! to make me a good feller, and keep me from sin. And say, there was all a faint sort of light around her head, like there was a candle behind her head, only there wasn’t no candle. . . .”

Mrs. Boardman glanced at her sister a little dubiously, and Joe perceived that he was laying it on too thick. You fool! he said to himself, why can’t you leave a thing lay, when it’s doin’ well.

However, he had Miss Gittings locoed with the story. The big grey eyes were full of wonder like a child’s. “Go on!” she said. . . . “Huh?”

“Well, when I looked again, she was gone,” said Joe. “But I felt all light, like, inside. I come out of the church, and went right to see the doctor, and when I told him I hadn’t no money, he said sure, he’d go see the kid, as often as would be necessary, and I could pay him when I earned it.”

“Fanny,” said Miss Gittings impressively, “we must report this extraordinary case to the circle. . . . Huh? . . . Let scoff who will! . . . We can produce the boy. . . .”

“Yes, sister.”

The front door opened and closed, and a slender shadow fell in the hall. Joe was instantly all attention. Another member to this household! The whole problem was altered.

“Wilfred, come here,” said Miss Gittings.

No response.

“Wilfred!” she repeated, raising her voice a little.

A boy of Joe’s own age came into the room with rather a sullen air; on the defensive. Joe perceived that it was that same white-faced boy. . . . God!

*that* kid! All the ground was cut from under his feet. For an instant he thought of flight.

But only for an instant. It steadied him to perceive that the kid was a lot worse upset by the meeting than he was. The kid's eyes were fixed and crazy, like. He was looking at Joe as if he saw a headless ghost rising out of the grave. It almost made Joe laugh. What the hell! he said to himself; the kid wouldn't dare to name anything to the women. And anyhow, he didn't see nothing but what his own dirty mind imagined. . . . He's no better than me himself. I can handle him, too.

"This is my nephew, Wilfred Pell," said Miss Gittings, pleasantly.

"Please to meet yeh," said Joe affably.

The frantic look in the kid's eyes warned Joe not to put out his hand. He *might* explode.

Wilfred had been down to Staten Island. The Aunts approved of these Sunday excursions. For once they were of a mind with Wilfred about something. To-day he had discovered a lovely spot called Willow Brook, which in its wild beauty and solitude might have been a thousand miles from New York, instead of actually within the city limits. It had been a good day.

Upon entering the house, his heart sank, recognizing from the tones of his Aunt's voice that there were strangers in the drawing-room. One could not get past the open door without being seen. And he did want to get to his own room to think. He debated sneaking out again, and entering by the basement, but his Aunt called him in her company voice. The second time she called, he was obliged to enter the room.

He was astonished to see a boy of his own age, sitting with his back to the windows. He examined him with eager curiosity. When the boy arose and came towards him, Wilfred's heart failed him. That boy of the East Side!—cleaner now, and better dressed, but the same boy! Wilfred turned sick inside. This was a hallucination, of course; that wicked, bold, long-nosed face had haunted him, these past weeks. This was the Tempter; the destroyer of his peace! Well, it was all over then; this was the end; he was done for!

Then his Aunt May introduced them to each other in her silly-sounding voice, and Wilfred realized that Joe was no apparition. He looked at him in helpless confusion. By what trick of fate had he come to be sitting in the drawing-room of the prim Aunts as if he belonged there? The explanation when it came was natural enough:

“This is the boy who brought me home when I sprained my ankle on Thursday night.”

Wilfred’s heart sank lower still; for this looked like the direct interposition of Fate or whatever Power there was, on the side of the enemy. If this boy had actually gained a footing in his own home, how could he, Wilfred, hope to withstand him, and all that he represented? . . . He didn’t want to withstand him. He was lost. After the first glance, the black-haired boy avoided looking at Wilfred. He was as demure as a cat. He knew his own power. Wilfred glanced at the roses with a painful sneer. Faded ones, of course, because they were more pathetic.

An awkward constraint fell upon the quartette. Aunt May, having introduced the two boys with as much as to say: You two ought to be friends, had become silent and fidgety. It must be apparent now, even to her fuzzy wits, that we couldn’t be friends, thought Wilfred. There was some desultory conversation between Joe and Aunt Fanny. The black-haired boy was exercising a horrible fascination over Wilfred. Fairly well dressed now, Wilfred perceived how good-looking he was. A healthy, pink color showed in the bold, thin profile; the whole head expressed a power of cynical hardihood. This boy doesn’t care *what* he does! thought Wilfred. In body, too, Joe’s shoulders were wider than Wilfred’s, and under the shoddy pants the line of a trim thigh was revealed. Joe’s comeliness sickened Wilfred. He has every advantage of me! he thought despairingly.

As from a distance, Wilfred heard his Aunt May saying to him in the manner of a rebuke: “Joseph has been telling us about himself. He has had a hard life. . . . I don’t know. . . . It is very interesting to hear. . . . Huh?”

“Wilfred has been so sheltered!” put in Aunt Fanny.

Wilfred listened woodenly. A screech of laughter sounded through him. Oh my Lord! they are on the way to make a hero of Joe!

“Very interesting. . . .” Aunt May repeated vaguely. “. . . Huh?” The presence of Wilfred forced her to look at Joe anew, and to ask herself what was to come of his being in the house. An unfortunate boy, and not to be blamed in any way; still . . . a great boy like that . . . almost a man . . .

An uncomfortable situation. Joe was master of it. He stood up, saying easily:

“I gotta go now. Malcolm’ll be lookin’ for me.”

A feeling of relief pervaded the other three. Joe, with eyes modestly cast down, waited for the ladies to invite him to call again. They felt strongly the suggestion to do so, but with Wilfred standing there, resisted it; and were glad that they had resisted it as soon as Joe was out. But all three inmates of

the house knew by instinct that they had not seen the last of Joe. The sisters looked at each other with eyes eloquent of relief. Nevertheless, Aunt May said:

“A deserving boy, sister. . . . Huh? . . . We must do something for him.”

And Aunt Fanny answered: “Yes; and gifted with a strange power, May.”

It fell to Wilfred’s part to show Joe out of the front door. When they got out in the hall Wilfred’s heart was pounding, and he had a difficulty in getting his breath. Not for anything would he have looked at Joe; he knew without looking, how Joe’s hard, bright, all-knowing eyes were fixed on his face; and Joe’s thin protuberant upper lip was flattened in a zestful grin. As Wilfred stood holding the door open, Joe came so close to him that he could feel the warmth of his body, and stood there, trying to make Wilfred look at him. But Wilfred would not.

“Goin’ to take a walk to-night?” Joe murmured.

Wilfred, nearly suffocated by the beating of his heart, silently shook his head.

“Well . . . any time you feel like it . . . come on down. You’ll find me somewheres around those corners. . . . I’ll show you ’round.”

Joe ran down the steps thinking: Funny look that kid’s got. But I got him going. Wonder why he takes it so hard? . . . Oh, to hell with them; the whole three of them is easy! I can get what I want out of them. . . .

Wilfred closed the door, and leaned his forehead against the ornamental glass pane. It had a sort of Gothic arch cut in the glass, from which depended a number of meaningless tails, each winding up in a curlicue. Wilfred, nauseated, was thinking:

“Any time . . . any time . . . that means I’ll have to fight it every night. . . . Wouldn’t it be better to give in at once, and save all that? . . . Disgust might cure me. . . .”

From the drawing-room Aunt May called him.

## VI

MRS. BOARDMAN poured her sister a second cup of coffee. Wilfred had just departed for school, and the sisters were able to talk more freely.

“Sister,” said Mrs. Boardman, looking very uncomfortable, “do you . . . do you entirely believe Joe’s story?”

Miss Gittings looked no less uncomfortable, but answered quickly: "I see no reason. . . . Huh? . . . Obviously Joe was too ignorant to . . . anyhow, you and I agreed long ago that it was better to be deceived than to be sceptical!"

"Wilfred says. . . ."

Miss Gittings caught her up. "And since when have we been taking Wilfred as an. . . . Huh? . . . Oh, Wilfred is so . . . I declare, Fanny! You know it as well as I do!"

"But Joe's story does vary, sister."

"That signifies nothing. A spiritual experience is susceptible of various. . . . Huh?"

"Well, very likely you're right. . . . What are you going to do about him?"

"Do about him?"

"Well, he keeps coming here. . . ."

"I don't see why you should put the entire responsibility up to me!" said Miss Gittings tartly.

"You brought him here the first time."

"I didn't!"

"Sister!"

"He brought me. . . . Huh? . . ."

"Oh, he makes me so uncomfortable!" cried Mrs. Boardman from her heart. "And you, too, sister! It is useless for you to deny it!"

Miss Gittings did not deny it. She merely stirred her coffee. After awhile she said: "I think my first plan. . . . Huh? . . . A strangely pertinacious boy! . . . Let us take him. . . . That must be his Jewish blood . . . to a meeting of the circle. If Professor Boiling or Mr. Latham should happen to. . . . Huh? They being men . . . it would be more suitable. . . ."

"Yes," said Mrs. Boardman with a sigh. "Certainly he is too much for us! . . . But sister," she objected. "If we took him to one of the meetings wouldn't it look as if we were prepared to vouch for him?"

"Vouch for him?" echoed Miss Gittings, startled. "Huh? . . . Well, what alternative is there?"

"I thought we might just mention Joe to Professor Bolling, without taking any responsibility for him, and ask the Professor here some night to question Joe."



Miss Gittings considered the suggestion. "Yes," she said, "letting the professor understand of course that our minds were quite. . . . Huh? We might ask Mr. Latham the same night; and Mrs. Van Buren; but not the other members of the circle with whom we are not exactly on. . . . Yes! And we might ask two or three people from outside the circle to whom we wish to show some little. . . . Quite informally. . . . Huh? . . . But Joe himself, sister, do you think. . . . Huh? . . ."

"Oh, I'm sure he will behave admirably," said Mrs. Boardman, not without a touch of bitterness. "He is so quick to adapt himself."

"It must all be very informal. . . . You might make one of your Spanish buns. . . . Huh?"

"Do you think we could pass wine? In father's day. . . ."

"I think that would be an affectation now. Everybody knows that we do not keep wine in the house. . . . It would give us an opportunity of asking Cousin Emily Gore here. . . . Huh? . . . She affects to be interested in. . . . And we cannot entertain such rich people in any formal way."

"Do you suppose Amasa Gore would come?" asked Mrs. Boardman eagerly.

"Naturally; if it was in the evening. Cousin Emily is not the sort of woman who goes out in the evening without her husband."

"Oh! in that case he could meet Wilfred, without it seeming to have been contrived! Oh, sister! if Mr. Gore would only take an interest in Wilfred, the boy's future would be secure! . . . But Wilfred is *so* difficult!"

"I will prepare him beforehand," said Miss Gittings.

"No! No! sister. I confess I do not understand the boy, but I am sure that would be a mistake! He becomes so cynical and obstinate when we try to point out a proper course of action to him. Say nothing to him beforehand. It is the only way!"

"Oh well, in any case Mr. Gore must do *something*. . . . Huh? . . . We may properly let them see that we expect it. . . . His wife's first cousin only once removed! . . . A pitcher of lemonade will be much more suitable. . . ."

"What about a bottle of whiskey for the gentlemen?"

"Cousin Emily would hardly approve. She has strong views. . . ."

## VII

MISS GITTINGS had asked Joe if he would come on such and such a night, and let a college professor question him about his "psychical"

experiences. There would be a few other friends present, she said. When Joe had suggested that his clothes were hardly suitable for an evening party, he had been met with silence and pained looks. He had not really expected to get a new suit out of it; he had discovered before this that these people, though they lived nice, were poor in the sense that they had to look twice at every dollar. He had begun to ask himself if they were worth bothering about; he hadn't got anything out of it; but now he decided that the chance of meeting their friends was worth one more night of his time.

Joe conceived the idea of bracing Isador Cohen for a new suit on the strength of his rise in society. Cohen kept the best-known secondhand store in town on lower Sixth avenue, and Joe had had various dealings with him. There were fine clothes in his store, too. So Joe had told his story to Cohen, offering to prove it by letting Izzy see him go into the Eleventh street house by the front door. Izzy took him up; and not only did he see Joe admitted to the house; but a moment later he received a greeting from Joe through the parlor window. Izzy subsequently allowed, that Joe was a smart feller, and advanced him a suit, and all the fixings. Joe picked out a neat blue cheviot of good quality, and was fitted and sewed up on the spot. At Izzy's they specialized in providing a man with a quick change.

The party was for eight o'clock. Joe was the first to arrive. The ladies of the house were greatly pleased with his improved appearance; but the white-faced boy walked out of the room when Joe entered, and did not appear again, until the other guests had come, and his Aunt went up-stairs to fetch him. The college professor proved to be a young man, tall; elegantly-dressed; and having a sort of childlike, wild eye. The other guests were mostly elderly. They were all solemn. Joe had not the slightest anxiety on the score of fooling them; because they obviously wanted to be fooled; and expected it. He made out to be quiet and bashful among the strangers. The white-faced boy was watching everything he did with a sneering smile: he was on to Joe. What of it? Joe was on to him, too.

Joe was reminded of a Broadway play by the way all the people sat and stood around the drawing-room, talking in fancy voices with the idea of letting each other know what fine people they were. Like kids at a sidewalk game. It was funny to see full-grown men standing for it.

The last pair of guests drove up to the house in a handsome carriage with two dummies on the outside seat, wearing tall hats with ornaments at the sides, and dark green overcoats with silver buttons. Joe watched them from the window. One dummy jumped down from his seat before the carriage quite stopped, as if he was worked by clockwork, and ran around behind the carriage to be ready to open the door. That's what I call style, thought Joe.

The entrance of this pair into the drawing-room changed the whole atmosphere of the party. It was clear to Joe from the silky quality that appeared in the attitude of everybody present, that these were not just ordinary rich people, but something exceptional. The professor was nowhere now. Seeing this, all Joe's faculties sharpened. He recognized a great opportunity. His whole nature went out to the new arrivals. He became one great yearning; to get next! to get next! The other people in the room ceased to exist for him.

The gentleman was a handsome, middle-aged man, somewhat soft in face and body. He wore a fine dress suit; and sported a neat, pointed beard. His expression was inclined to be sulky; his eyes gave nothing away. The lady was a tall, spare, faded blonde; wearing an expensive, ugly green silk dress, and a good deal of jewelry. She had a proud, sour look; and took all the smiles and bows of the people present as her right; whereas the gentleman was indifferent to them. Joe hung around them, hoping to be taken notice of. He had not been brought to the attention of any of the guests yet. The lady put up her glasses, and looked at him as if he had been something in the menagerie; the gentleman took no notice of him whatever.

Joe soon gave the lady up. She was not in his line at all. He concentrated passionately on the gentleman. He surrendered himself, that, by entering into this other nature, he might command it. By degrees Joe became aware that the gentleman scorned spirits and spiritualists: that he had been brought there against his will: that rich though they might be, his wife had him tied fast to her strings: that behind his grand front lurked a timid soul. He was an intensely respectable party; his clothes; his expression; his whole bearing showed how conscious he was of being respectable: and yet! . . . and yet! . . . The sharpened Joe at certain moments perceived a pained roll to the man's eyeballs, such as you see sometimes in a horse. He had a trick of wetting his lips with his tongue; and when he did so, Joe took note between mustache and beard of how fleshy and dark those lips were. Joe glanced at the sour-faced wife, and smiled inwardly. Hope dawned. With a man so respectable as that, you'd have to be damn careful what you *said*; but you could let him see things without saying them.

Oblivious to the clack of voices in the room, and the moving about, Joe, quietly, with all the force of which he was capable, desired the gentleman to look at him. Since the rich pair were the centers of attraction in the room; everybody trying to bespeak their notice by word or smile, his task was difficult. Joe was patient. It doesn't matter how long it takes, he said to himself; he must look at me in the end . . . he *must* look, because I want him to.

In the midst of a conversation with somebody else, the gentleman's bored glance suddenly swerved to Joe. Joe, outwardly the quiet, abashed boy, let a world of meaning appear in his eyes for him alone. The gentleman was startled; he hastily turned away his glance. He changed color; puffed out his cheeks a little; twirled the ornament on his watch chain. By and by his eyes came creeping back to Joe's face, and found Joe's eyes waiting. The two pairs of eyes embraced, and were quickly cast down. I've got him going! thought Joe exultantly.

Joe had heard the gentleman addressed as Mr. Gore. That suggested nothing to him; Gore was a common enough name. But later, he heard the lady call her husband Amasa, and when he put the two names together, a great light broke on him. Amasa Gore! Joe had read plenty about *him* in the newspapers. One of the sons of Isaac Gore, with whose story every boy of the streets was familiar. The smartest guy America had ever produced; the little wizard of finance; the railroad wrecker; who used to throw Wall street into a panic by holding up a finger; and who died leaving a hundred million dollars. For an instant Joe's heart failed him at the bigness of the game he had cut out for himself; *Amasa Gore!* But he stole another look into the gentleman's face, and confidence came winging back. He was only a man like any other. He was easy!

When the psychical part of the evening was introduced, Joe accommodated himself to the wind from Mr. Gore's quarter. If Mr. Gore had come there expecting to give the laugh to the spiritualists, naturally he would be put out if the show appeared to be a success.

So Joe turned tongue-tied and idiotic. He could relate no interesting experiences; he boggled at answering the simplest questions. The ladies of the house were astonished and shamed before their guests; the professor was nonplussed; the white-faced boy in the background though he had always mocked at the psychical experiences, looked at the distressed faces of his Aunts and was angry. However, Joe cared nothing about these people now. He saw that Mrs. Gore took the failure of the exhibition as a personal affront to herself, and that her husband was secretly pleased that she was cross. Joe was satisfied with the outcome.

The professor abruptly dropped his questioning, and the while company plunged nervously into general conversation again. Joe saw that they would have liked to kick him out, but they couldn't, because it would not have been high-toned. Instead, they all made out from that moment that Joe was no longer present. That suited Joe very well. He remained in an obscure corner between the end of the piano and the dining-room door. At intervals

Mr. Gore's uneasy eyes crept to Joe's face, and never failed to find Joe's eyes waiting.

There were great difficulties in Joe's way. Mr. Gore was so respectable and scary, he saw that it would be up to him to make all the running. In the end his man might escape him out of sheer funk. It was necessary for him to have a private word or two with Mr. Gore before the evening was over; and how was that to be managed when the millionaire was continually surrounded by admiring listeners, who obliged him to play the respectable. That's what's the matter with him, thought Joe, thinking of the pained roll to his eyeballs; there's always people watching him, and he never has a chance to be bad. Well . . . !

Refreshments were served. There was a blight upon the party, and while it was still early, the ladies retired up-stairs to put on their wraps. The gentlemen had left their hats and coats on the hall-rack, and they stood in the hall talking, while they waited for the ladies. Besides Mr. Gore and the Professor, there were two others. The boy who lived in the house had disappeared. It was now or never with Joe. With a modest air he made his way out between the gentlemen. He knew Mr. Gore would look at him as he passed; and he did look. Joe gave him a speaking glance; and letting himself out the door, waited on the stoop.

It worked. Mr. Gore presently came through the door behind him, and glanced importantly below as if he had come out to make sure that his carriage was waiting. He made a great business of cutting and lighting a cigar; ignoring Joe. Joe smiled inwardly. He had but a precious second or two; no time to beat around the bush.

"I couldn't go on with that fool business after I seen you," he murmured. "I could see that you was on to that foolishness."

"That was very, very wrong of you!" said Mr. Gore severely; "to deceive those good ladies!"

"I never thought of the wrong of it until after I seen you," said Joe, making his eyes ask. "Then I was sorry all right. . . . It was them led me into it. They liked to be fooled. And I'm only a poor boy."

"Have you no employment?" asked Mr. Gore.

Joe shook his head.

"Um! . . . Ha!" said the millionaire.

"Will you give me a job?" whispered Joe.

Mr. Gore looked scared, and puffed out his cheeks. "Impossible!" he said. "Ah . . . in my sort of business there is nothing suitable. . . ."

“Will you let me come to see you?”

“Impossible!”

“Oh, I don’t mean come to your house,” said Joe. “Of course the Madam wouldn’t like a poor boy like me comin’ round. . . . But to your office . . . ?”

“Quite impossible!” gasped the millionaire.

Joe heard the voices of the ladies within. He had but one more throw! “If you was to walk home to get the air, like,” he whispered swiftly, “I could catch up to you. And you could talk to me. If I only had a man like you to tell me what to do . . . !”

Mr. Gore gave no sign. The door opened, and the rest came streaming out on the stoop. Joe flattened himself against the balustrade, and watched. There were polite good-byes. It seemed to be the general feeling that the Gores must be allowed to get away first; and everybody else remained on the stoop, while the millionaire handed his wife down, and the footman opened the carriage door. Mr. Gore paused with a foot on the step, as if he had just had an idea.

“. . . Er, my dear,” said he to his wife, “I am smoking. I will walk home so that you may not be troubled by the fumes.”

Joe felt like God.

The footman closed the carriage door, and running around behind, climbed up nimbly as the carriage started. The turnout clip-clopped briskly down the street. Mr. Gore set off towards the Avenue, swinging his shoulders.

The long-legged young professor suddenly scampered down the steps. “Oh, Mr. Gore, if you’re walking . . . !” he cried.

In his heart Joe cursed him.

Mr. Gore paused politely. There was a brief exchange on the sidewalk which Joe could not hear. Then . . . the professor remained standing where he was with a foolish look, and Mr. Gore walked on, swinging his shoulders. Joe’s heart rebounded.

## PART TWO: YOUTHS

## PART TWO

### I

NOTHING in the Gore offices could have been changed in many years, Wilfred supposed. Many a country lawyer did himself better. Mr. Amasa Gore shared one very large room with his secretary, John Dobereiner and his assistant secretary, or office boy, or door-keeper, or whatever you chose to call him, which was Wilfred. The room had a door opening directly on the public corridor; and double doors in the right and left walls. Various officials of the Gore railroads strolled through from time to time; and Mr. Isaac Gore, the elder brother, was in the habit of making his escape through their room, when his own way out was blocked. Still, there was privacy of a kind, the room was so big. From his corner Wilfred could not hear what Mr. Gore might be saying in his corner; nor could Dobereiner from his.

Wilfred's particular job was to open the corridor door when anyone knocked. He would open it a crack first, with his foot behind it, while he reconnoitred. So far there had never been any excitement. Nothing was painted on the door but the number of the room, 47; and this password, was given out only to Mr. Gore's friends. Occasionally a crank or a begging widow took a chance and knocked: that was all. In the beginning Wilfred had speculated on what he would do should an anarchist burst in with a bomb in a satchel. That had happened to Russell Sage, once. Wilfred had made up a story about it, in which he played a heroic part; but it was not one of his best stories.

Mr. Gore's big roll-top desk was turned cater-cornered. The door into his brother's office was at his hand in case *he* wanted to make a quick getaway. When he was seated at his desk, Wilfred could see no more than the thin lock of hair which waved on his forehead, and his sulky eyes when he raised them. Mr. Dobereiner's desk was in the other front corner; Wilfred's desk in one of the back corners. One could have given a ball in the middle of the room.

The great chance of his life! his aunts called it; being placed so close to a millionaire. How Wilfred hated it! Day after day he felt as if there was some foul stuff smoldering in his breast, the fumes of which were slowly suffocating him. So much had been made of this job, he couldn't conceive of any escape from it. The whole millionaire atmosphere; the bluff, man-to-man air which the cleverest of Mr. Gore's creatures had learned to adopt



towards their master; he hated it. The private secretary, Dobereiner was an out and out toady and lick-spittle; Wilfred didn't mind him; it was the fine gentlemen; the various stockbrokers; corporation officials; dummy directors and so on; Ugh! Loathsome!

Mr. Gore was a good enough employer; liberal; he was rather a fool behind his big front, and Wilfred could have liked him under other circumstances. Millionaire and office boy preserved a distant air towards each other. Wilfred took care to keep the lashes lowered over his resentful eyes. He kept his employer's check-books and accounts; thus he knew that Mr. Gore's income amounted to more than seven hundred thousand dollars a year. It made the office boy grind his teeth.

Wilfred had not enough to do to keep him busy during office hours; and he shamefully neglected what he had to do. It had been understood when he came, that he was to perfect himself in shorthand; that he might take some of the correspondence off Dobereiner's hands. There lay the Pitman textbook, and the note-book handy to his hand; and the sight of them turned his stomach. Wilfred spent the greater part of the days in listless dreaming: his body held in such a position that to a glance from behind he might appear to be practicing shorthand. He suspected that Mr. Gore spent hours dreaming, too. Well he was able to if he wanted. Certainly there wasn't much business transacted in that office. Yet Mr. Gore kept regular office hours. Apparently he hadn't anything to do, but come sit in his office. So far as Wilfred could judge he had never read a book in his life. What an existence for one with two thousand dollars a day to spend! But to scorn his employer didn't help Wilfred any; he knew he was the idle apprentice, and he hated himself.

A murmur was heard from Mr. Gore's corner, and Dobereiner, springing up, paddled to his employer's desk. He had very large flat feet that turned out wide, and his knees gave a little with every step. He had bulging blue eyes that held a doglike expression; and his broad, ugly, German face was always oily with devotion. An invaluable creature, Wilfred conceded, but not the man he would choose to have around him. A brief whispered colloquy took place—everything was whispered in that office; and Dobereiner came hustling over to Wilfred's desk, breathing a little hard, as one who bears momentous tidings.

"Mr. Gore has decided not to go out to lunch," he said. "Please bring him a glass of milk and two chicken sandwiches from the directors' restaurant."

Wilfred cast a glance on Dobereiner, and went out. In a moment or two he returned—empty handed. Dobereiner ran to meet him.

“Where is Mr. Gore’s lunch?” he demanded, aghast.

“I gave the order,” said Wilfred. “A waiter will bring it directly.”

Dobereiner’s slightly bloodshot eyes stuck out at Wilfred—but more in dismay, than anger. “I told you to bring it!” he stammered. “Mr. Gore must not be kept waiting!”

Wilfred looked at him without speaking, one side of his mouth pressed stubbornly into his cheek. All but wringing his hands, Dobereiner turned, and waddled out of the room.

In due course he returned, bearing the glass and plate as if they were holy vessels. Placing them on Mr. Gore’s desk, he stood back. Mr. Gore did not ask the wherefore of this act of service, but picked up one of the sandwiches, and bit into it. Wilfred suspected that such incidents as this did not injure him with his boss; after all they were of the same class: it was other things.

Mr. Gore was still munching when there was heard a light, assured tapping on the glass of the corridor door; two fingernails rotated. Wilfred’s breast burned and his lip curled painfully as he went to open the door. They all knew who this was. Dobereiner turned a foolish, beaming smile towards the door; and Mr. Gore looked over the top of his desk with all the sullenness gone out of his face. Wilfred opened the door; and Joe Kaplan breezed past him.

“‘Lo, Wilfred! . . . ’Lo, Mr. Dobereiner. . . . Good morning, Mr. Gore.”

He got no answering greeting from Wilfred; but a fat lot Joe cared for that. That was the worst of it; filled with a fervor of indignation, Wilfred had not the power to make Joe feel it. Why? He knew. It was because his indignation was insincere. The sight of the glittering Joe made him sick with envy. He was crushed by the hatefulness of his own feelings.

Wilfred scanned him in the effort to discover something . . . something that would enable him to feel superior. But Joe was too perfect; he was too exactly what Wilfred himself dreamed of becoming; the gay, gilded, insouciant youth. Insouciant was one of Wilfred’s favorite words. To be sure, Joe was a little *too* well-dressed to be a gentleman; but there was nothing blatant about him; he picked things up too quickly. And everybody was ready to forgive a slightly dandified air in so good-looking a youth. Wilfred, while he sneered at the beautifully-fitting dark green suit with a small check, the puffy Ascot tie with a handsome pearl in it, the Dunlap derby fresh from the burnisher’s iron, secretly admired. Somehow Wilfred’s effects never came off. Though they were of the same age, the finish Joe had

acquired made him look three or four years older. Wilfred was miserably aware of being an untidy and gangly eighteen.

Joe plumped himself down like an equal in a chair at Mr. Gore's left hand; and their heads drew close together. Whisper; whisper; whisper; punctuated with chuckles. Joe was visible at the side of the desk; but Mr. Gore Wilfred could not see; however, he knew only too well how the man's face relaxed; how his sulky eyes became moist and irresponsible; and how the thick lips parted. Almost anybody except the fatuous Dobereiner could have told at a glance what was the relation between those two. Wilfred had no difficulty in reading his employer; a sensual man, weak and shy. It was Joe's perfect shamelessness which had won him. It was the same with everybody. The satyr in Joe's hard, bright, close-set eyes encouraged the imprisoned appetites to come out and stretch themselves. Had not Wilfred felt it himself? Only he could not let himself go. He did not blame Mr. Gore; there was something warm and human in the man's surrender. He was getting something that his nature craved. But Joe! while he smiled and murmured and debauched others, *his* eyes remained cold and bright and watchful. What a horror!

What did they talk about? They were arranging the details of parties, Wilfred assumed; small, discreet parties, conducted without danger of discovery. That would be Joe's business. Wilfred's opulent imagination proceeded to supply the details of their parties. Oh Heaven! supreme luxury and voluptuousness! And Joe of course, a sharer in it all. Envy suffocated him. Joe had turned out such a tall, handsome, graceful fellow. And no foolish scruples to hamper him! Joe shared in it; the soulless gutter-snipe; the lad no older than himself; he had everything; money; good clothes; admiration; and endless pleasure: while he, Wilfred who *had* imagination and feeling was poor and half-baked and despised and starving for joy! Why didn't the dull millionaire come to *him* for his pleasures? He had imagination. In Joe's parties there would be a leer; but in *his* only a mad, mad joy! In the midst of this Wilfred grinned bitterly at himself; for he knew well enough that he was shameless only in his imagination. A shivering fastidiousness held him in leash. After all, Joe was a fitter instrument for the millionaire.

These talks between Mr. Gore and Joe always ended in the same way. Mr. Gore pulled out a little drawer in his desk, and took something from it that found its way into Joe's trousers pocket. The fool! thought Wilfred; does he suppose I'm not on to him? Always, later, a check would be made out to a certain Harry Bannerman, a creature of Mr. Gore's, who would carry it to the bank; and bring back the wherewithal to replenish the drawer

against Joe's next visit. Many hundreds of dollars weekly. Mr. Gore did not require cash for anything else, since he had credit everywhere.

And then Joe, sleek and elegant as a panther, would steam out, scattering good-byes; and Mr. Gore, resuming his ordinary sulky mask, would glance intimidatingly at poor Dobereiner and Wilfred, as if daring them to suggest that he had ever dropped it. Dobereiner of course, had no thought of criticizing his master; and Wilfred at least adopted a polite air of inscrutability. On this occasion whether or not Mr. Gore suspected the thoughts that Wilfred hid under it, he said:

"Bring over your note-book, Pell."

Wilfred obeyed with a heart full of bitterness—sharp apprehension, too. *He* was required to make pot-hooks while Joe was sent out with a pocketful of money, to scour the markets for beauty! The inevitable humiliation awaited him now; perhaps the final humiliation. Wilfred hated his job, but was none the less terrified of losing it. For where would he, the timid, the self-distrustful, the half-baked, find another? And how could he ever face the Aunts who had plotted for years to obtain this job for him?

After an unhappy quarter of an hour Mr. Gore said in a bored voice: ". . . Er . . . How long does it take to learn shorthand?"

"Three months," murmured Wilfred.

"You've been studying it longer than that."

"It's difficult . . . to apply oneself at night."

"Well, I'm sure you're not very busy in the daytime. . . . What's the matter with you, Pell? You would do very well here, if you would only wake up. You appear to be half asleep most of the time."

"I will try to do better," mumbled Wilfred, loathing himself.

He went back to his desk, seething. The fool! The fool! The empty-headed, dull, rich fool! It's lucky he has his money-bags to give him some identity! He hasn't even got brains enough to go to the devil by himself, but must hire a boy to lead him!

Then his mood changed. He sat staring at the square glass inkstands on his desk, with their lacquered iron covers; cheap stuff stamped out by the million. What is to become of me? he thought with a sinking heart; I undertake to rage at everything, yet I am no good myself. There is no beginning place in me; I am spread all over. I want to be . . . I want to be everything, and I have started at nothing. Everything I try to grasp dissolves in my hand. I exist in a fog! . . . God! how I hate business! My father was a failure, and I am a failure, too. What is one to do if one has the instincts of a gentleman and no money . . . !

Dobereiner was looking over at Wilfred in horrified commiseration. He could imagine nothing worse than to be rebuked by Mr. Gore. During the rest of the day his manner towards Wilfred was gentle. Wilfred glared at him helplessly.

## II

JOE had chosen the top floor in a row of old walk-up flats on West Fifty-Eighth street. The neighborhood was one of the best in town; but the house itself was unimproved, and a little run-down; anybody might live in such a house. It was pleasant too, to walk up the interminable, dark, shabbily-carpeted stairs, and at the top burst into a paradise of red velvet portières and Oriental divans crowded with feather cushions. Joe had bought all the stuff himself; it had been great to pick out the very best quality velours and the thickest rugs. It was Mr. Gore who stipulated for a walk-up apartment. In a house with an elevator, you ran the chance of a blackmailing elevator boy.

Jewel Le Compte (Mr. Gore had suggested the changed spelling of her name) sat half reclining in a Morris chair, sewing a ribbon strap on a sheer undergarment, with microscopic stitches. Joe lay stretched out on a divan with his hands under his head, watching her. She was wrapped in a blue silk kimono embroidered with pink chrysanthemums; Joe had picked that out, too. Her legs were crossed, and from the foot which was elevated, a quilted blue mule dangled free of her rosy heel. Her plentiful black hair was gathered in a rough twist on top of her head: and she had no make-up on her face. Joe liked to see her without her war paint; when she left it off, the babyish look came back to her cheeks; they no longer looked all of a piece; but showed delicate, dusky discolorations and unevennesses. A damn pretty girl, Jewel; and how well she suited her luxurious surroundings! He had had the wit to foresee that while she was still in Allen street.

From time to time Jewel looked up from her sewing, and her eyes travelled with pleasure over Joe from head to foot.

"You're fillin' out," she remarked. "You'll soon be a man."

"Aah!" said Joe; "I'm man enough alretty to be *your* master!"

Jewel laughed. "Listen to it! I got you to nurse, boy."

"Where would you be if it wasn't for me?" demanded Joe.

"Oh, as a business manager you're all right," said Jewel. "That wasn't what I meant. . . . In ten years maybe you can talk about bein' my master!"

"How do you know I'll stick to you that long?" asked Joe.

“Well, you will. Not that it matters . . . but you will.”

Joe felt uncomfortable. “Why will I?”

“I don’t know . . . I guess we’re a pair . . .”

A thousand recollections tumbled into Joe’s mind. He looked at Jewel and in her unsmiling eyes he saw the same things that were in his own mind. For the moment he seemed to have become Jewel; and Jewel him; he the woman; Jewel the man. It made him feel queer. “Aah!” he snarled.

Jewel resumed her sewing. “It’s like this,” she said; “with all the other fellows I’ve known, I had to chuck a bluff, see? One kind of bluff or another. And they the same with me. Like an Irish jig, when you dance up to your partner and back. . . . But with you—though you’re only a boy, it’s different. . . . You belong to me, like.”

“The hell I do!” said Joe.

Jewel shrugged. “Not that my saying so, matters. Either it’s so or it isn’t so, and we can’t change it.”

“I t’ink you got Jewish blood, too,” said Joe, “That’s how they talk.”

“I do’ know what I got,” she said indifferently.

“The Jews are a great people,” said Joe; “when they chuck all that Jewish bunk, and get down to tacks. . . . But an old-fashioned Jew! Gee! Like my old man. A preachin’ Jew’s the limit!”

Jewel was not listening to this. The color of her eyes seemed to darken. “I know why it is,” she said. “With me . . . you forget yourself.”

“You forget yourself, too,” said Joe quickly.

“Oh, sure!” she said lightly. Joe perceived resentfully that she only said it to shut him up. “It’s great to be able to make a fellow like you lose himself,” she went on with a slow smile; she was honest enough then; “you’re so stuck on yourself!”

“Aah!” said Joe sorely. For the moment he could find no rejoinder; he studied her, looking for some way to get back at her. “You’ll get fat,” he said at length.

“Sure, bright-eyes!” she said unconcernedly. “Your eyes run over me like rats. . . . But at that, men will still like me.”

“Why will they?”

“I dunno. . . . It’s somepin. . . . For the same reason maybe, that women will always run after you, you pink and black devil!”

“Because I’m so handsome?” said Joe, grinning.

“Nah! there’s a plenty of handsomer fellows than you!”

“Well, you’re no Lillian Russell!”

“It’s somepin we know . . . but I don’t know how to name it. . . . Neither you nor me gives a damn. . . .”

“Now you’re talkin’!” said Joe, pleased.

“But . . . we’ll never be able to get shet of each other,” Jewel went on with her darkened eyes.

“We’d better get hitched, then,” said Joe, sneering.

“Oh, Gawd!” she said, disgustedly.

Joe echoed her disgust. “Oh, Gawd!”

They looked at each other and laughed.

“You’ll always come back,” she said.

“I’m gonna marry a swell dame,” said Joe; “the pick of the whole four hundred. . . . You needn’t laugh. You wait!”

“Go ahead,” she said.

“You kin marry, too, if you play your cards right.”

Jewel laughed suddenly. “Thanks for the favor,” she said. . . . “Not on your life! I like my own self too well. I like to live alone. . . . Why should I marry? I ain’t ambitious.”

“To get a man to keep you when you’re old,” said Joe.

“I’ll put by enough for me old age,” said Jewel. “I don’t want much. All this—” she waved her arm about, “is all right to attrac’ custom, but it don’t mean nottin’ to me. . . . A nice plain room wit’ a winda on a busy street. There I’ll sit. . . . All I want good is a bed. My bed must be of the best; a box spring and a real hair mattress. Plenty of tasty food cooked the way I like it. Nobody to hinder my comin’ and goin’; nobody wit’ the right to bother me! That’s livin’!”

“Aah! you’ll git like the fat lady in Barnum and Bailey’s!”

“All right!”

“It wouldn’t suit me,” said Joe. “I want to be mixed up in things. I’m gonna be a big man. One of the biggest. I been about a bit now. I’m as smart as anybody I see. I’m gonna make them feel me. I like to see the buggers crawl on their bellies. Like Dobereiner. I’ll have a secretary like Dobereiner. Makes you feel great. . . . And a hell of a big house on Fift’ Avenoo, and a yacht and a private car . . . there isn’t anything I won’t have!”

“You’re welcome to it,” said Jewel. “Seems childish to me.”

“And a swell-lookin’ wife to take around, wearing diamonds all over her. . . .”

“Just the same, you’ll come to see me,” said Jewel smiling to herself; “fat though I be.”

“Have you braced the old man?” asked Jewel.

Joe armed himself with caution. He had been waiting for this. “No,” he said. “All bills paid, and a hundred a week clear! Ain’t yeh satisfied?”

“No,” said Jewel. “This may blow up any time. I want to be protected. A lump sum down. A man as rich as that; it’s customary. It don’t have to be in cash. A string of pearls, if it suits him better. Or anything I can realize on.”

Joe smoothed out his tone. “You’re right, Jewel. You’re certainly entitled to it. Just leave it to me. I’ll brace him as soon as the time is ripe.”

“The time is ripe now,” said Jewel with quiet stubbornness.

“Who’s runnin’ this show?” Joe demanded.

“There’s some things you don’t know,” said Jewel. “You’re only a kid. The time is ripe. The old man is ripe.”

“All right,” said Joe. “I’ll brace him next time I see him.”

“That’s what you said before. You needn’t mind now. I’ll brace him myself to-night.”

Joe sat up suddenly. “Go ahead!” he cried violently. “And the whole show’ll blow up right then! I know that old geezer! If *you* ask him for money, he’ll fade! He likes to make out it’s all a fairy-story like, when he comes here.”

“Has he already given you the money for me?” Jewel asked unexpectedly.

Joe’s mouth opened and shut. He perceived that he had betrayed himself by showing too much heat. Oh well, he had to have it out with her anyhow. “Yes,” he said coolly, falling back on the divan.

Jewel stood up suddenly. Her sewing fell to the floor. She stood over Joe with clenched hands; a flush in her dark cheeks; her big eyes burning—she was handsome! “You dirty cheat!” she said, not loud. “You rotten kid! Rotten before you’re ripe! You thieving Jew! . . . I might have known how it would be!”

Joe felt relieved. If this was how she was going to take it, he was right there with her. He grinned up at her. “Aah! chase yerself!” he drawled. “This is my show. I started it, didn’t I?”

“You didn’t earn this money, damn you!”

“I put you in the way of earning it!”



Jewel suddenly quieted down. "Was it in cash?" she asked.

"No, railroad bonds. He got 'em out of the safe deposit box himself."

Jewel sat down, and picked up her sewing. This was what Joe was afraid of. He ground his teeth together. "Aah, what was you anyhow when I picked you out of the gutter?" he cried noisily. "You was nottin' but a dirty little Allen street. . . ."

Jewel smiled at him. "What's the use?" she said; "you know you got to fork out."

"I'm damned if I will!" cried Joe. "Now you know it, what you goin' to do about it?"

Jewel merely pulled her sewing this way and that.

"I'm damned well gonna keep those bonds!" shouted Joe. "You tell the old man when he comes here to-night! Maybe he'll hand you a new set. I don't think! What *can* you do? It's back to Allen street for yours if I drop you. The old man'll fire me, you says. What the hell do I care? 'll still have the mon', won't I? I'm about troo wit' t' old stiff anyhow . . . and he don't need neither me nor you no more, if you want to know it; cos I've taught him the ropes. There's plenty other girls."

Joe's tone changed. ". . . But you got him eatin' out of your hand. He don't want to hafta make up to a new girl. If you was wise you could keep him long as you wanted. The longer you kep' him, the harder it would be for him to make a break. You could work him for a whole sheaf of gilt-edge bonds. But you gotta make a stink, I suppose. That's just like a woman. All right! All right! If you're so stuck on the Allen street houses. . . ."

Joe ran out of matter. You've got to have some return from the other side in order to keep this sort of thing up. He jumped up, and walked about the room muttering angrily; picking things up and putting them down again; darting little side looks at Jewel. She went on sewing.

Joe found his voice again. "It's up to you now. I warn yeh! I'm about to resign the job as your manager anyhow. It don't give me enough scope. I'm tired suckin' up to that old dub—to anybody! I'm gonna operate on my own now. I'll have them comin' to me! And I don't need no woman in my business neither! . . . A few thousands is little enough for you to pay me for puttin' you where you are. . . ."

In spite of himself, Joe could not keep his mind on any one line; it shot off this way and that. He sounded weak to himself. How the hell had he come to let himself be put on the defensive anyhow? Now, struggle as he would, he could not keep a whining tone from coming into his voice.

“Aah! what’s the matter with yeh? I ain’t tryin’ to swipe the bonds offen you. You know me! I on’y want to use ’em for a little while. I got a scheme. . . . I can pay you back twice over. I can make money for both of us. You said I was a good business man. Well, I’m a better business man than you know. On’y I got to have a lump sum to start with. As a decoy to attrac’ more. I’ll tell you my scheme. . . .”

“I ain’t interested,” said Jewel, biting off her thread.

“Now listen, Jewel. . . .”

“You hand over my bonds,” she said, looking at him steadily. “When they’re in my own hands, then you can talk. I’ll have the handling of my own money, see? If your scheme looks good to me, I’ll put something in it— but I’ll say how much.”

Joe flung himself down on the divan again. “Yeah!” he said in extreme bitterness. “You think you’re gonna run my business, don’t you? What you know about business? You never been off Allen street till you come up here. You’d do better to stick to your own business, and leave me mine.”

“Where are the bonds?” she asked.

“Aah! in the inside pocket o’ me coat.” Joe flung an arm over his eyes.

Jewel got up without haste.

### III

**F**ROM his place in the corner of the basement room Wilfred watched the other diners covertly. Had he but possessed a mantle of invisibility his happiness would have been complete. As it was, his pleasure in looking at people vanished when they looked at him. There were four places at a table, and he was most comfortable when all were taken. People sitting so close, never looked at you; and they made a sort of screen for you; moreover he was able to listen to their talk, and to build upon it.

He ate his dinner in this place on West Tenth street once or twice a week; or as often as he could scare up the necessary thirty-five cents. He told his Aunts he had to work late at the office. How scandalized they would have been could they have seen him sitting there with a bottle of wine before him. They would never realize that he was grown. The place had no license of course, and you had a pleasant feeling of lawlessness; at any moment the police might come banging at the door. But they never had. A plain and friendly place, it supplied something that Wilfred had apprehended in novels of foreign life. He had got in the first time by attaching himself to the tail of a party at the door. Now he was known there and hailed by name. The

generous minestrone, ravioli, etc., made his stomach purr. When he sat back and lighted a cigarette, life ceased to appall.

It was run by a handsome Italian woman with a heavenly smile, named Ceccina. Her husband, Michele, held sway over the kitchen, which was revealed through an open door; and their three children Raymo, Alessandro and Enriqueta helped their mother to wait upon the tables. Simple people; Wilfred loved them from a distance, except the little girl, who was pert without being engaging. It was the fault of the fond patrons. Wilfred felt it his duty to discourage her. He had a specially warm spot for Alessandro the bullet-headed one, a blonde sport in that dark family. Alessandro, always watching for a chance to sneak out and play in the streets, was often in trouble with his father, who swore at him in English, without being aware of the comic effect of his aspersions on the boy's parentage.

The round table in the middle of the room, which would hold six at a squeeze, was reserved for a little company of friends that included two known authors; a lady editor; an artist; and a long-legged young man of unknown affiliations, whom the others called the bambino. These people constituted the focus of interest in the place. Wilfred watching them, and listening, decided against them. Let the authors be known as well as they might, their circle was not the real thing; its brilliancy was self-conscious. One author looked like a walrus with his tusks drawn; the other like an elderly trained poodle. The artist had a voluminous cape to his overcoat; and rattled his stick against the door-frame when he entered. Somebody said he designed labels for tomato cans. The room was small enough for Wilfred to scoop in these bits of information, as they flew about.

These and others in the room were of the general show; there was one group that Wilfred had taken for his own; whom he regarded with an intensity of interest that hurt. Young fellows, no more than a year or two older than himself; lively young fellows; and good friends! Until he had come to Ceccina's he had never seen any young men like these, but he immediately understood them; he seemed to have been waiting for such. The conventions upon which young men ordinarily formed themselves, had no force with them. Their eyes seemed to see what they were turned upon; they were interested in things; they could let themselves go; and how they talked!

Two of them came every night. These addressed each other as Stanny and Jasper. Stanny was short and sturdily built; with an expression of doughty wistfulness that arrested Wilfred. He had a tenor voice with rather plaintive modulations, that went with his eyes. A man every inch of him, from the set of his strong shoulders, and his courageous glance; but a man who felt things and wondered. Up to this time Wilfred had despairingly

supposed that manliness was the capacity for not feeling things. Jasper, with his crisp, bronze, wavy hair, and warm color, was full of a slow, earthy zest. His face generally wore a sleepy half-smile; and he had a trick of squinting down his big nose. Wilfred inferred that he must have wit, from the surprised laughter which greeted his rare sallies.

These two were sometimes joined by an older man with a fine, reticent face and silky black beard, whom they called Hilgy. Hilgy had his features under such control, that it was impossible to decide whether he was speaking in jest or in earnest. Wilfred observed that sometimes his own friends did not know how to take him. Hilgy liked to string them. Sometimes a thin, handsome youth no older than Wilfred, made one of the party. They called him Binks; and so exuberant and audacious was his style, that all hung upon his words, though he was the youngest among them.

Unfortunately for Wilfred, these fellows, unlike the party at the center table, talked low and all he could get of it was a phrase here and there. He had gathered that they were all artists, though they wore their hair short, and dressed like anybody else. They forced him to reconsider all his notions about artists. Art! the word rang hopefully in Wilfred's consciousness; it was a way other than business, of making one's living. Of course he couldn't be a painter, because his fingers were all thumbs. But a writer, perhaps; that was an art, too. Years ago, his grandfather had told him he had imagination; he had been hugging the assurance ever since. Nobody else had ever suggested that he had any worthy quality. Still, a writer!—how ridiculous to dream of such a thing, when he lacked a college education.

For many nights Wilfred had been watching these happy fellows. Such friends! What would he not have given for one friend, and each of these had three! Talk boiled out of them. Sometimes at a heard phrase, Wilfred's own breast would froth up like yeasty beer. It was so extraordinary to discover that they talked about the same things that troubled his mind! They were clever. They poked sly fun at the other diners. Once Wilfred caught Stanny's nickname for the writer who looked like a poodle: "Flannel-belly!" Inexplicably right! he laughed whenever he thought of it.

Wilfred had taken two of the four to his heart; Stanny and Binks. But his feelings toward them were different: for the one he felt a violent affection and sympathy; for the other, a violent, helpless admiration. One or another of these two, or both of them, linked arms with Wilfred in his waking dreams; and into their attentive ears he poured the frothy stuff that choked his breast. When he came to himself, he would smile, to think how in his dreams, he did all the talking.

On this night none of the fellows had come, and Wilfred was obliged to swallow his disappointment. Ceccina had finally been obliged to give their places to a party of overdressed strangers from up-town, who stared rudely around the room, and made audible comments. Such people cheapened everybody in the place. Wilfred cursed them under his breath.

Then the bell rang, and Stanny and Jasper entered the room, a good half hour after their usual time. Wilfred's heart leaped like a lover's; then set up a tremendous pounding; for the only two vacant places together, were at his table. The two crossed the room as a matter of course; and Stanny asked him politely if they might share his table.

"Certainly!" stammered Wilfred, keeping his eyes down. He simply had not the courage to look at them so near to.

They sat down side by side opposite him. Wilfred's breast was in a commotion. His confusion must have affected the other two, for they were silent at first. Undoubtedly they thought him a churl, who hugged his solitude. He could not bring himself to look at them. He was bitterly upbraiding himself. You fool! What a poor figure you are cutting! Why can't you be natural? These are simple, likable fellows, willing to be friends. They are your kind. What a chance! And you're throwing it away! You won't get another such chance. This is what comes of dreaming! Unfits you for the reality. . . .

Their soup was brought; and they hungrily applied themselves to it, with encomiums upon its flavor. While waiting for their next course, they picked up a conversation that had evidently been dropped a little while before. They spoke low; but Wilfred's sharpened ears heard every word.

"I think you're foolish," said Stanny, "after working in the office all day, to sit in your basement nights, hacking away at your carving. With a book of Italian verbs open besides you, too. Or if you're not there, you're sitting in Madame Tardieu's stuffy room, droning French with that tiresome old soul!"

"She needs the money," mumbled Jasper. His shy, unsure utterance endeared him to Wilfred.

"Well, that's not your fault," said Stanny, slightly exasperated. "You're too easy. She knows she's got a good thing, and she's nursing it along. . . . I say, it's not natural at our age."

"What else is there to do, nights?" grumbled Jasper. "We haven't any money to spend."

"Loaf!" said Stanny, promptly. "A certain amount of loafing is necessary to the soul's health. You're doing violence to your nature with this continual grind. It'll get back at you some day. This self-improvement business can be

carried too far. How can you improve when you've worked yourself into a half-doped state? . . . I bet you fall asleep in your chair at Mme. Tardieu's many's the night, while the old body drools on."

"It's a fact," confessed Jasper.

While they talked together, ignoring him, Wilfred quieted down. It was better they should ignore him, he thought; for if, as was probable, they should not like him, that would be worse. Meanwhile what a glimpse into their lives he was getting!

"Last night," said Jasper in his diffident, masculine voice, "I was sitting in Madame Tardieu's room. It's true, I was half asleep. I happened to look out of the window. . . . In the house opposite, there was a girl going to bed. She'd forgotten to pull down the shades. . . . Damn nice-looking girl! When she put up her arms to unpin her hair . . . lovely round arms . . . such a picture! . . . Well . . . I lost my head. I said good-night to the old lady in a hurry, and I went . . . I mean I went across the street. . . ."

"*What!*" exclaimed Stanny.

"It's a rooming house. The outer door was closed. I waited on the stoop until one of the lodgers came home. Told him I'd lost my key. He let me in. I went up to the girl's room and went in. . . ."

"Good God! what did *she* say?" demanded Stanny.

"Oh, she was surprised," said Jasper shyly. "But she didn't make much of a fuss . . . I stayed. . . ."

"Suppose she *had* made a fuss?"

"I didn't think of that."

"You had been drinking!"

"No. . . . Something got into me. . . ."

Wilfred was astounded and delighted by this anecdote. Such delicious effrontery was almost inconceivable to him. It was *right*, thought Wilfred; that was the gallant way; the mad, imprudent jolly way! Jasper loomed a hero in his eyes. He ventured to steal a look at the pair of them. Stanny was a little scandalized by the story—but only a little. Evidently it was much the sort of thing a friend might expect to hear from Jasper. Then Wilfred looked at Jasper; and at the same moment Jasper happened to raise his shy, wicked eyes to Wilfred's face. A spark was struck, and suddenly they laughed together.

Wilfred blushed scarlet. "I'm sorry," he stammered. "I couldn't help hearing. . . ."

"Oh, that's all right," said Jasper, blushing, too. "You know how it is."

A warm tide of joy coursed through Wilfred. To be hailed by Jasper as a fellow!

Stanny now included Wilfred in his remarks. He was annoyed. "A piece of folly, if you ask me," he said. "God knows what might have happened!"

"But it wouldn't, to him," said Wilfred. "There wasn't any room in his mind for it to happen."

Stanny looked at Wilfred dubiously. Wilfred blushed again. What nonsense am I talking? he thought.

"He understands," said Jasper, with a jerk of his head in Wilfred's direction.

"Yes, I understand," said Wilfred, a little breathlessly. "But I wouldn't have had the nerve to carry it through, myself. I think it was fine!"

"Huh!" said Stanny. "You don't know this idiot as well as I do. Works himself into a state of stupefaction. Then suddenly blows up, and doesn't know what he's doing. I don't call that rational!"

"Oh well, reason isn't everything!" said Wilfred grinning.

"Hear! Hear!" said Jasper.

Stanny's irritation was only on the surface. He grinned back at Wilfred. "You shouldn't encourage him!" he said with an affectionate glance at Jasper. "The old stove-in-bottom! You wouldn't think he was capable of it, to look at him, would you?"

"I'm not bragging about it," said Jasper with an aggrieved air. "I only told you how it was. I'm ashamed of myself now, I felt rotten about it all day."

"If it had been me, I wouldn't be ashamed," murmured Wilfred.

"Anyhow, you're no Joseph!" said Jasper to Stanny. "How about Myrtle?"

A flicker of disgust made Stanny's face look pinched. "Oh, that was just a common or garden pick-up," he said; "all conducted according to rule. It's ended. Two nights ago I blew her to a ride in a hansom. Bowling down Fifth Avenue. Felt like a lord! She spoiled it by getting mercenary. I invited her to get out, and came home alone."

"Why shouldn't she be mercenary?" asked Jasper mildly.

"Sure, I'm a sentimentalist!" said Stanny.

Wilfred experienced a pang of sympathy. Glancing in Stanny's face, he thought: He deserves better than that!

Spaghetti was brought to Stanny and Jasper; and they applied themselves to it. Wilfred, who had finished his meal, lit a cigarette with slightly

trembling fingers; and prayed that this might not be the end. In his mind he searched furiously around for interesting matter to carry on the talk; while at the same time another part of his mind warned him not to force the occasion, or it would break down as it always did; but to let the occasion use him. While he was still distracted between these inner voices, the talk started of itself.

Said Stanny: "When I came down-town to-night, I saw that they had taken away the female figures leading up to the Dewey Arch on either side. Charlotte Marshall posed for those figures. She comes here sometimes."

"I've seen her," said Wilfred. "What a strange creature!"

Stanny smiled at him good-naturedly, in a way that made Wilfred feel very young. Of course! thought Wilfred. I was trying to be wise. I *will* be natural!

"All legs," grumbled Jasper.

"Well, that's the sculptor's ideal," said Stanny.

"The degenerate sculptor's ideal!"

"Anyhow, it looks a lot better without them—or her," said Stanny. "I like it, though it's been damaged a bit by the weather, and by the hubs of the busses driving through. Wish you could have seen the pair of drivers I saw to-night, racing through abreast, licking their horses like the chariot race in Ben-Hur."

"It's not really good," said Jasper. "Just a lot of miscellaneous architecture."

"Well, you ought to know, old Goat and Compasses!"

"I like to look at it," said Wilfred shyly. "Just because it was run up for a sort of festival. It was a damn fool thing to spend all that money on a monument of lath and plaster. That's why I like it. Everything else is so damned useful. . . ."

He suddenly became aware that both young fellows were listening to him. Self-consciousness supervened, and his tongue began to stumble. They listen! he thought. I can talk too.

"Do you paint?" asked Stanny.

Wilfred shook his head. "I'm only a millionaire's office boy," he said, trying to carry it off with a grin.

"That's nothing," said Stanny quickly. "I make line drawings for James Gordon Bennett, and Jasper here, draws plans for a millionaire jerry-builder."



“Some day I hope to write,” Wilfred said. In that moment his resolution was formed.

“That so?” said Stanny with interest. “We haven’t got a writer in our bunch.”

Wilfred’s heart almost burst out of his breast. Did he mean anything by that? . . . But probably not.

Thenceforward, talk never failed.

The three youths left the restaurant together. A despair had seized upon Wilfred. There was nothing further he could do to prolong the occasion. He had no place where he could ask them to come. This was the end! They paused on the sidewalk.

“Which way you go?” asked Stanny, offhand.

“I live in Eleventh street.”

“Walk around by the Avenue with us.”

So he obtained five minutes reprieve. At the Eleventh street corner they paused again. Wilfred’s heart was low. His tongue clave to his palate.

Stanny said in the forthright manner that became his doughty self so well: “Look here; I’ve got a garret up on Fourteenth street. Jasper’s coming up. Would you like to come and look at my stuff?”

Would he! Wilfred could scarcely reply. “Oh yes!” he murmured. “I was hoping you would ask me.”

Both lads looked at him with quick pleasure. Without knowing it, he had said exactly the right thing. They marched up-town three abreast.

“Got anything to drink?” mumbled Jasper.

“Divil a drop, you sponge!”

“I . . . I wish you’d let me . . . stand treat,” stammered Wilfred. With his fingers, he made sure of the limp dollar bill in his trousers pocket. That was for lunches the balance of the week, but . . . !

“All right,” said Stanny. “We’ll go round by Maria’s, and get a bottle of Nebiola . . .”

#### IV

**T**OWARDS the close of the business day, Joe Kaplan dropped in at Harry Bannerman’s little office on Nassau street. He had been there before. In his sphere, Harry occupied much the same relation to Mr. Gore that Joe did in his. It had been no part of Mr. Gore’s plans to make his two favorites known to each other, but they had in a way of speaking smelled

each other out. No doubt it had occurred to Harry, as it certainly had to Joe, that an alliance would be useful. How else could they keep tab on each other? It had greatly amused Joe to watch Harry's face when he had unexpectedly come into Mr. Gore's office one day to find Joe seated by the millionaire's desk. Joe could imagine Harry going to Dobereiner for information; and Dobereiner getting off his innocent spiel about the clever young man whom Mr. Gore was educating! How Harry must have been tormented by the sums in cash he was forced to draw every week! Well, now, unknown to Mr. Gore and Dobereiner, Harry and Joe had become "intimate" friends. That was funny, too!

"'Lo, Harry!" said Joe. He allowed a shadow to appear on his brow, and rolled his Eden perfecto moodily between his lips.

"This is out o' sight!" cried Harry. "I'll be through directly. We'll go out and have something."

Behind this parade of heartiness, Joe perceived the glitter of hatred, and exulted. He dropped on a chair, and extending his elegantly trousered legs plucked at the creases. A sickly look appeared in Harry's eyes. Don't he wish he was me! thought Joe.

Joe said, gloomily: "I need a drink!"

"What's the matter, old fel'?" asked Harry.

Joe, observing the spring of eager malice in his eyes, thought: He's a smart fellow; but I'm smarter. I can play on him like the piano. I can surround him all about, and be ready for him to move in any direction! Joe said: "You've got me in a hole, that's what!"

"I?" said Harry, opening his china blue eyes, candid for once in his astonishment.

Joe chuckled inwardly; and looking Harry over, made him wait for the explanation. Harry was a young man, but not so young as he looked. He made a business of being a young man. He was slender; yet somehow he gave the impression of being soft and plump. A dimple in one cheek contributed to that effect. From the neck up he had a naked look, though his head was furnished with a sufficient quantity of hair. It was one of those heads of hair that suggest a wig. He even had a small, stiff mustache, every hair of which was laid in order. Just the same his face had a naked look.

"How could I get you in a hole?" he asked.

"I been talkin' too much about you up at the flat," said Joe. "About our gettin' to be friends, and goin' around together, and all."

"Has she told *him*?" asked Harry sharply.

“Nah! That kid is wise. She don’t tell the old man anything but what he wants to hear.”

“What’s the trouble then?”

Joe scowled. “Aah! She wants me to bring you up there while the old man’s out of town.”

Harry quickly lowered his lids—not so quickly, though, but that Joe perceived what was under them. It was funny! Harry of course, was out of his mind with curiosity concerning the flat on Fifty-Eighth street, and it’s occupant. “Well . . . why not?” said Harry with a shrug.

“Good God! man!” cried Joe. “Suppose the old man got on to it?”

“Why should he get on to it, if the girl is on the level with us?”

“Suppose she was to get stuck on you?” said Joe. “Where would I be?”

Harry fiddled among the papers on his desk. “Oh, you can leave that to me,” he said with a laugh. “I’m not going to let her . . . I might ask you the same question. Where would *I* be if she did?”

“I don’t see how you could help yourself,” said Joe. “If you attempted to discourage her, it would only make her worse. I tell you frankly, after a certain point *I* can’t handle her.”

“What did she say?” Harry asked, keeping his face averted from Joe—but Joe marked the deepening dimple.

“Said she was bored, seeing nobody but the old man and me.”

“Well . . . you’re not old,” suggested Harry.

“Oh, I’m like her brother,” said Joe. “We scrap all the time.”

“I mean, what did she say about me?”

“Said if I didn’t bring you up, she’d come down here.”

“So this has been going on some time?”

“Oh, a couple of weeks.”

“Well . . . it’s up to you,” said Harry. “You’re running that show.”

“Do you want to come?” asked Joe.

“Oh, I’m only human,” said Harry, shrugging. “I’m curious to see what the old man’s taste is. . . . But it makes no real difference. I have other interests as you know.”

Joe grinned inwardly. Does he think he’s taking me in, the jay-bird! He said, grumblingly: “Well, I suppose I’ll have to take you. I’ll get no peace until I do! . . . Look here, if there should be any trouble, can I count on you to do the right thing by me? Suppose the old man should get on to something, will you tell him it wasn’t my fault?”

“Why, sure!” said Harry, with a reproachful look. “You ought to know me better than that, Joe! . . . Make your mind, easy. There isn’t going to be any trouble. I’m the quietest little pot of tea that ever brewed on the back of the stove!”

“All right,” said Joe. “We’ll go on up, after we’ve had a drink. We can have dinner sent in from outside.”

Shortly after midnight Joe and Harry issued out of the house on Fifty-Eighth street. Apparently there was nothing to choose between them for mellowness; but Joe was not as mellow as he was making out to be. He linked his arm affectionately within Harry’s.

“You’re a damn good fellow, Harry! I think the world of you! . . . Just the same there’s going to be trouble as a result of this night’s work!”

“You’re foolish!” said Harry, dimpling. “She didn’t care. . . .”

“I know her!” said Joe significantly. “She wasn’t going to let anything on to you, of course. And me being there, too. . . .”

“Well,” said Harry expansively, “even so! Need the heavens fall? . . . Oh my God! what a skin! Like old white velvet. . . . What the old man don’t know won’t hurt him!”

“Look at the position it puts me in!”

“You don’t need to know, either.”

“Aah . . . !” Joe grew vague. “Well, I can’t help it. . . . ’S too soon to go home, old fellow.”

“My club is near here,” said Harry. “Come in for a nightcap.”

Nested in a deep leather chair, with a fresh cigar between his lips, Joe’s gaze at the dying fire appeared to become slightly rapt. “Look here, Harry, you’re the best friend I’ve got. I can talk to you. God! the life we lead, we never get a chance to open up. You don’t dare to let yourself go with any ordinary guy. . . . I want to tell you something, Harry. I suppose to you I appear just a fly kid; happy-go-lucky, and all that. But that ain’t the real me. I hate the position I’m in. You’re a whole lot better off than me; still, it’s much the same. I don’t see how you can stand it either!”

“Stand what?” asked Harry sharply.

“Sucking up to that ————!”

“Well, there are good pickings!” said Harry with a sickly smile.

“To hell with pickings! Are you going to be satisfied with his droppings all your life? Not me! . . . We only have to look around us. Everybody on the

inside is making pots of money right now, pots! There's never been anything like it. Why shouldn't we? Wouldn't you like to have money enough of your own to tell that old swell-front to go to hell, and close the door as he went out?"

Harry twisted in his chair without answering.

"Well, I mean to," said Joe. "I want a pile, and I'm going to grab it."

"How?" asked Harry.

"Well, I been picking up quite a bit about the ways of the Street, one place and another," said Joe. "I make the old man talk about it, without his getting on to how much he's giving away. All the talk is of mergers now. The air is full of it. That is how the money is made. Millions in a stroke of the pen!"

"Everything is merged, now," said Harry.

"Not quite everything. I'll tell you about a cunning little merger that I have in mind. These electric cabs that have increased so fast the last two or three years. You see them everywhere now. There are five small companies operating them. The damn things are so expensive, and they break down so often, the companies are all bankrupt, and only keep going by selling more stock all the time. You can always stick the public with a new thing like that. How about merging all the New York cab companies?"

"But if they're all bankrupt . . . ?"

Joe wagged his hand. "What do I care about that? Think of the publicity! Everybody is interested in cabs. Cabs are romantic. Cabs are always associated with going on the loose. And horseless cabs have news value. Look here! First you go round to the different companies and make an agreement with each one. Oh, it ain't much of an agreement. They simply agree to come in if the others do, see? Anybody will agree to that. But the five agreements make a good-looking bunch of documents to shake in a sucker's face, see? He won't read 'em. Then you incorporate. There's regular men you can get for incorporators. I'm going to call it the Consolidated Cab Co. Con. Cab 'll look good on the ticker. . . ."

"It's a con, all right," said Harry.

"By God! that's right!" said Joe pulled up short. "A cheap josh might ruin us. Well, call it the Manhattan Cab Company, then. Man. Cab on the ticker. . . . Soon as you're incorporated, you let loose your publicity. 'Big Corporation formed to take over all New York cabs!' That's news, see? You don't have to pay for it. It's good for a front page spread. Then you place an order for a thousand new cabs. That's another news story. Then you get an option on an abandoned car-barn, and announce a super-garage, see? And so

on. You tell how wonderful the new service is going to be, and quote the reduced rates. The papers will eat it up.

“When you get the public appetite sharpened, you begin to put out your stock on the curb in a small way. You must have real nice engraved certificates; none of your filled-in stuff. Of course the wise guys know there is nothing behind it but hot air, but some of them will take a chance on it. They always do. Hundred dollar shares will sell for four or five or six on the curb. That’s enough when you can issue all you want. It’ll pay expenses. You hire a nice office—nothing showy; and engage a polite old geezer with white hair to take in the visitors’ cards. And so on. Then I’ll have Amasa Gore approached. . . .”

“Do you think for a moment you’re going to sting *him*?” said Harry.

“Nothing like it! He’ll be invited to share in the profits! . . . Suppose the stock is selling on the curb at six, see? He’ll be offered a thousand shares out of the treasury, or as much as he wants, at three, see? Then it will be announced that Amasa Gore is taking an active interest in Manhattan Cab, and will be elected as vice-president at the next directors’ meeting. The stock will jump to ten or twelve then, and he’ll sell out on the q.t. You know he does that all the time. He told me so himself.”

“And when it becomes known that he has sold?” said Harry.

“Oh, anybody that wants, can have Manhattan Cab then,” said Joe with a grin. “I’ll be short on the stock, myself.”

“Where will you get yours?” asked Harry.

“After the company’s incorporated, I’ll have a set of directors of course. I’ll have them vote me a thousand shares out of the treasury stock for my services in promoting the company. Then I mean to put some real money into it, too. When the stock is first put out on the curb, I’ll be the buyer, see? To create a market. I’ll get it cheap. I’ll have two or three thousand shares when the time comes to sell.”

“It listens good,” said Harry.

“Oh, I’ve only given you the rough outlines. I’ve got the details all planned out.”

“But you’re not nineteen yet,” objected Harry. “Your face is too smooth. You couldn’t command attention.”

“Lord! what do you think I am!” said Joe. “I’m not going to appear in this personally. It would queer me, after. This isn’t going to be my last deal on the street. I’ll get fellows to act for me. You don’t think I’d undertake to sell Amasa Gore any stock, do you? He don’t look on me in that light. And you know how sore it makes him when anybody disarranges his ideas. . . .”

No, I want you to put me onto somebody who will take on the promotion of the company, after I've got my thousand shares. I want a young fellow with plenty of vim and go; enthusiastic, but not *too* smart. What they call idealistic, see? It'll be my job to fire up his steam. A fellow with a name that is known in the street, if possible."

"There is Silas Moore Bristed," suggested Harry.

"That's a good-sounding name. I've heard it before."

"Sure, you have. He's grandson to the first Silas Moore Bristed, the famous inventor, whose name is borne by several big corporations. But it's all passed out of the family. Young Silas is as poor as a church mouse. He's a salesman in a bond house."

"A good sort of fellow?" asked Joe, conveying a certain intimation.

"Innocent as a lamb," said Harry.

"Well, I'll look him over."

"I'll introduce you."

"No you don't! Just tell me where he's to be found, and I'll get next him. He mustn't know of any connection between you and me, because later, he'll have to come to you, when he wants to make his proposition to Amasa Gore."

"Oh, I see!" said Harry with a thin smile.

There was a silence.

"Well . . . I suppose I got to go," said Joe, smothering a yawn.

"Look here," said Harry in a voice that showed strain, "what is there in this for me?"

Joe clapped him affectionately on the shoulder. "Why, you'll be right in on the ground floor, old fel'! I'll tell you the exact right moment when to buy and when to sell. You ought to clean up a nice little pile on it!"

"How about a little treasury stock for me, too?"

"What for?" asked Joe with a cold stare.

"You really need me in this," said Harry. "You've got ideas, I grant, but I've got the experience. You and I ought to be working together shoulder to shoulder in the background."

"I certainly am grateful for any help you can give me," said Joe, "but I hadn't counted on regularly taking anybody in with me. There isn't enough in it for two."

"Oh hell!" said Harry, "what's a few shares of treasury stock more or less. Issue me a thousand shares, and I'll guarantee to get Amasa Gore into

it. You know what influence I have there.”

“Is that a threat?” asked Joe calmly.

Harry appeared to be wounded to the quick. “What do you think I am!” he cried. He looked around him as much as to say: In my own club, too!

“Because, if it is,” said Joe, coolly, “there’s nothing to it. Whether you get any treasury stock or not, you have a chance to make thousands buying and selling the stock on the curb. You’re not going to queer that!”

“If you think that way about me, I can’t talk to you,” said Harry, with dignity.

Joe looked at him quizzically. “Aah! climb down!” he said.

There was a silence. At length Harry said: “Well, do I get the thousand shares?”

“You *do* not!” said Joe promptly. “This is my scheme. You can’t expect to come in on the same basis as me!”

“Well, five hundred, then,” said Harry.

“Oh hell!” said Joe, “I can’t Jew a friend down! I want you in with me, Harry; that’s a fact! I look up to you, Harry. You’ve taught me a lot. I’ll make it five hundred shares. . . .”

## V

**W**ILFRED could scarcely credit his own situation. There he lay, he the solitary one, inside man of four lads stretched out on two cots placed against the wall of Stanny’s studio in the assumption that they would afford more room when they were shoved together. The other three were asleep. Sleep was far from Wilfred’s eyes. His head hummed with wine. He lay on his back, very still in his strait place for fear of disturbing Stanny, who was alongside him. Jasper was on the other side of Stanny; and Jasper’s young brother Fred had the perilous outside place.

It had started to rain fitfully on the tin roof overhead. Wilfred remembered how the low-hanging clouds had rosily given back the glow of the street lights. That delicate glow was coming through the skylight now, pervading the room with a ghostly radiance. The front of the room came down like a low forehead to two windows, set in only a foot above the floor. You had to go down on your knees to look out. Below, all day, was spread the panorama of the shoppers on the busy side of Fourteenth street opposite, and the sidewalk vendors with their baskets. The skylight was in the high part of the room at the back.



That room was dear to Wilfred beyond measure. Not for its beauty, because it contrived at the same time to be both bare and littered—it was a chaos now, after parties on two succeeding nights. It was the first room where he had been free; a man's room, smelling of tobacco, where you could spread yourself. It didn't have to be tidied up until you felt like it; dirty clothes could be kicked into the corners. The paraphernalia of Stanny's trade lay about—Stanny, his friend, whose thick shoulder lay warmly against Wilfred's thin one now; drawing-boards; sheets of bristol board; drawings stood up with their faces turned to the wall; and everywhere, thumb-tacks and Higgins ink bottles with their tops like black nipples. To the walls were pinned several of Stanny's best drawings; distant prospects of landscape that stung Wilfred with their beauty. It was marvellous to him that such effects could be created with a scratching pen. When Stanny drew people, their faces all had a slightly tormented look. Funny!

It had been a lively thirty hours in the lives of the friends. Wilfred went over it in his mind, smiling into the darkness. Jasper's young brother Fred had come down from Lockport to see the town; and they had had a supper of canned lobster and Nebiola in his honor. That started it. To their provender had been added a fruit cake, brought from home by the guest—such a fruit cake as Wilfred had never tasted. Canned lobster and fruit cake! Nobody had been sick but the guest.

At first they had been rather disconcerted by their guest. Jasper didn't know his brother very well, it appeared. Fred knew all about New York from hearsay, and undertook to tell them. He didn't say so; but it was clear he was a little surprised at there being no ladies included in the supper party. He drank largely of Nebiola; and unquestionably enjoyed himself; but his air of implying that there was something naughty about it all, rather dashed the others. Until Hilgy began to jolly him in his quiet way. But after Fred had been sick, he returned to the table with a pale and thoughtful cast, and they liked him better.

That soft-voiced, poker-faced mockery of Hilgy's was rather terrible. None of them was safe from it; not Hilgy himself: because when he desired sympathy, the others supposed that he was still mocking. Then Hilgy would get a little sore. He was a handsome fellow, with his silky black beard, and the subdued manner that concealed such powerful batteries. You never knew you had been hit, until a moment or two afterwards. Wilfred was in awe of him, he was so much older; almost thirty. It annoyed Hilgy that anybody should be in awe of him, so Wilfred struggled to treat him as offhandedly as Stanny and Jasper did; whereupon Hilgy, perceiving the struggle, with

characteristic perversity started mocking Wilfred subtly. So intercourse was a little difficult. Yet Wilfred admired Hilgy without stint.

What a privilege it was to be associated with such fellows. Wilfred doubted if there was a circle in all New York that could show the same average of brilliancy. Unfortunately he couldn't recall any of the bright things that had been said; he hadn't that kind of a memory; but he had the scene of the party to a hair. There were only three chairs in the room; and they had dragged up the cot to make two seats more, while Wilfred sat on an up-ended suit-case. Stanny at the head of the table—How Stanny blossomed under the influence of Nebiola, yet never lost his plaintive air; Jasper at the foot, looking down his nose with an expression of. . . .

What was the word to describe Jasper's expression when he had had a drink or two? Sly drollery? . . . no! Recondite glee! . . . no! Arch solemnity? . . . well that was better, but not *the* phrase. I shall never be a writer! thought Wilfred sadly. Epithets do not explode in my head like they do in Stanny's.

. . . Hilgy and Binks sitting on the cot; and Fred alongside Wilfred. Five keen, vital faces to watch, revealing their characteristics in the wrinkles of merriment—well, say four faces, because Fred's was rather a pudding; united in good fellowship, yet betraying such fascinating differences of nature, and suggesting such mysteries! Wilfred was unable to imagine a greater pleasure.

When the laughter and gibes were suddenly turned against Wilfred himself, he was ready to sink under his confusion; but he liked it nevertheless. It assured him that he had an identity too.

After supper Binks had become delightfully silly. A special bond united Wilfred and Binks; the kids of the crowd, exactly the same age. They had to conceal their kiddishness from the older fellows, but might reveal it to each other when alone. They were intensely jealous of each other. Wilfred had to be content with second place, because Binks surpassed him in everything. Binks at nineteen already had his drawings in the best magazines. Wilfred was enslaved by his admiration of Binks' elegant air that was not dependent upon dress, his outrageous audacity; his faculty for making friends. Binks was nonchalantly one with gangsters, and with the Four Hundred. What a Godsend that would be to me, thought Wilfred; if I had it.

Amazing fellow, Binks! He had said: "My boss asked me to lunch on Wednesday. He runs what he calls the Simple Life Club. Not so damn simple. Has in the fellows who write and draw for his magazine to amuse the society dames he knows. I sat next to Mrs. Van Buren. . . ."

"Mrs. Peter Polk Van Buren?" asked Wilfred, amazed.

“Yes, that’s her.”

“The most beautiful woman in New York!” said Wilfred, “and the greatest name!”

“That so”? Well, she was a peach all right. As we took our places she kicked my foot under the table. She begged my pardon, and I said: ‘Oh, go as far as you like!’ It sort of broke the ice. She said she was dying to smoke; but she didn’t know how the other women would take it. I said: ‘Oh, go ahead. When they see you start they’ll all smoke themselves black in the face!’ Across the table sat:” he named names that took Wilfred’s breath away. “Some party! . . . I came home afterwards, and carried down the washing from the roof for my mother.”

By degrees Wilfred had perceived that Binks’ affections were not warm like Stanny’s and Jasper’s. With sharpest pain he thought: The fellows he met last night for the first time are just the same to him as us. . . . Oh well, that’s his nature. You have to take him as he is. When Binks got drunk, and, no longer clever, made believe that the studio was a skating rink, Wilfred felt like a father to him. At any rate I can carry my liquor better than Binks, he told himself.

After supper there came a point when Jasper burst into flower like that night-blooming plant whose name Wilfred couldn’t remember. He stood behind a chair, haranguing them in the manner of a rabbit-toothed curate with his spectacles slipping off his nose. A rag-tag parody of biblical quotations, and pulpit jargon. The congregation rolled helplessly on the floor. At such moments, Wilfred thought, Jasper under his unsure manner revealed richer ore than any of them.

The supply of Nebiola had given out; and they went cascading down the four flights of stairs for a fresh supply. They found Maria’s restaurant empty; and in the back room Binks banged on the piano while the others danced. Oh! the combination of Hilgy’s grave, sad head and skittish legs. Hilgy never laughed; he only caused the others to. It seemed to Wilfred that as his friends became wilder, he grew ever more sober. But as they stopped to read a sign in the street, an enormous laugh was suddenly directed against him when it was discovered that he was holding one eye shut. I must have been drunk, too; thought Wilfred, surprised.

The rest was merely noise and wild laughter. Pictures leaped out of the dark. The foolish Fred, dressed up like d’Artagnan and posed upon the model stand for Stanny to sketch—he had no idea he was being joshed; Stanny’s expression of indignant wistfulness when he tried to rise from the floor, and discovered that he was sitting in the glue which somebody had

overturned. Oh, how good it was to laugh! It washed you out! Oh, Nebiola, and the pink foam in the glasses! How these expansive rackety nights drew fellows together! After two such nights on end, Wilfred felt that he had a real hold upon them.

The next day was Sunday. They met at noon in a cheap restaurant on Fourteenth street. There was renewed laughter at the sight of Jasper's morose expression as he pushed a piece of dry toast around his plate with a fork. Fred was pitiful; all the Lockport doggy air had gone out of him. It transpired that Jasper had invited Hilgy (who lived up-town) to spend the night with him and his brother, and the bed had collapsed under the triple load. There had been a high old row. The widow with whom Jasper lodged had fired them on the spot; and it was only after much persuasion that she had relented to the extent of letting them stay out the night.

"She had a mash on Jasper," said Hilgy, "and what really made her sore was him seeing her in her nighty and curlpapers. She realized that she could no longer hope."

The situation was awkward since practically all their money had been spent in Fred's entertainment. However Stanny had said they could share his studio until they scraped together enough to pay an advance on another room.

The moving was the occasion of the second party. It was more restrained than the first owing to a certain shortage of supplies, still . . . ! At midnight between two showers they had issued out to conduct the hegira. Returning, what a circus! A treat for the occasional passer-by. Hilgy first with rolls and rolls of tracing paper under one arm; and in the other hand the front end of Jasper's trunk. Jasper next with the hinder end of the trunk in one hand; and in the other the front end of a folding cot. Binks had the stern end of the cot in one hand; and an end of a drawing-table in the other; Wilfred the other end of the drawing-table and one handle of a Gladstone bag; Stanny the remaining handle of the bag, and more rolls of drawings and tracings. Fred brought up the rear, walking alone, with a suit-case in each hand, and more rolls caught under his arms.

Thus they made their way up the midnight Avenue, like one of those wooden-jointed snakes that were sold on Fourteenth street. Whenever anybody stopped to stare at them, the grave Hilgy capered like a goat. In the middle of the street, Jasper's suit-case (carried by Fred) burst with a loud report, flinging soiled under-clothing, broken shoes and lead pencils far and wide. Fred, dropping the suit-case, fled up the street, and made out he wasn't with them. The others as well as they could for laughing, gathered up the

debris. Hilgy held up a torn union suit in an attitude of pensive regard. Oh, Gee!

At the Fourteenth street corner a suspicious cop had stopped Hilgy with a question. This was nuts to Hilgy. Putting down his end of the trunk, he walked down the line, introducing each fellow by name to the officer with a childlike air. . . .

Wilfred lost in the scene he was picturing, snickered aloud. A low voice at his ear recalled him to his surroundings; the bed; Stanny's room; Stanny himself alongside.

"Aren't you asleep, Wilf?"

"No. I thought you were."

"Hell! I can't sleep."

Stanny slipped his arm through Wilfred's. It was the first time since Wilfred could remember, that anybody had made such an overture in his direction; he caught his breath and felt quite silly and confused. He pressed Stanny's arm hard against his ribs, and neither said anything.

Finally Stanny asked: "What were you laughing at?"

"At Hilgy and the cop," said Wilfred. "I've been going over it in my mind . . . trying to find words."

"Oh, for God's sake!" said Stanny, "when you start dramatizing a thing you spoil it!"

"I know," said Wilfred eagerly, "I know just the point when analysing things becomes barren. I stop short of that now. It's all right to think about things when you can keep yourself detached from them."

"But you never can!"

"Oh yes, I can, now," said Wilfred confidently. Suddenly his confidence ran out of him. "Well, sometimes I can," he amended.

Stanny chuckled derisively.

"I know, I'm foolish . . . But you like me . . . ?"

Stanny squeezed his arm.

"I . . . I can't tell you what you are to me, Stanny. . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, don't try!" said Stanny quickly.

"To have somebody I can talk to like this . . . I can't believe it! I had made up my mind that I was a freak. I expected to be laughed at, so I intended to hold my tongue all my life. . . . Do you think I am effeminate, Stanny?"

"Oh, for God's sake . . . !"

He *does* think so; thought Wilfred; but it doesn't matter if he is my friend.

"It isn't important," said Stanny, groping for expression; "all this bunk about manliness . . . if you have mind . . . if you have character. . . ."

"Yes, but have I?" demanded Wilfred.

"Don't worry about it . . . ! You're too self-conscious."

"Sure! But how can I help that? You're like my Aunts. When I was little they were always telling me I was too thin-skinned. You might as well blame a man for being blind."

"Don't think about yourself so much."

"Everything comes back to yourself. Yourself is the only measure you have for other things. . . . I've read hundreds of books, but I've never had anybody to tell me things. I don't even know how to pronounce the words I have read, because I never heard anybody say them. . . . Only my grandfather, and he died when I was eleven. He was a man! I read his books. They are stored in a packing-room next to my room. Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and Tyndall were his favorites. I can't make much of Huxley or Herbert Spencer, but Darwin! Oh, Gee! Darwin is my man!"

"Why Darwin in particular?"

"I dunno. Sort of mental hero. Always willing to face a new fact though it destroyed all his work up to that moment. . . . My grandfather wasn't a one-sided man. He read the poets too; also Emerson and Carlyle. I'm crazy about Carlyle. . . . It was fine to discover that your nature and mine were alike, Stanny!"

"You hop about so!" grumbled Stanny. "The hell they are!"

"I know. . . . It is you and the others, who have cured me, made me healthy in my mind. I used to think I was going crazy. . . . But especially you. There's something between you and me . . . like this, we can talk about things. . . ."

A start of laughter escaped Stanny, which had not altogether a merry sound.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Wilfred.

"Well, when we talk . . . you do most of the talking."

"I suppose I do. . . . But you must know that nothing would please me better than to have you talk to me about yourself. How can I lead you on to talk about yourself, except by going on about myself?"

"I know," mumbled Stanny. . . . "It's not from any lack of friendliness that I don't. It's all inside," he touched his breast; "but I can't get it out. It

hurts. . . .”

“I know,” whispered Wilfred.

“You don’t know!” said Stanny irritably. “Things come out of you easy enough. We’re different. You think over to-night and last night, and it makes you chuckle. I don’t feel like chuckling. I drank too much wine. It brings things up in me that I can keep under most times. I drink to forget, and it only makes things clearer. I dread the end of the evening, when I’ve got to lie here staring. . . .”

“What things?” asked Wilfred in concern.

“I don’t know. . . .” Wilfred heard his teeth click together in pain. “I’ve got my head against a stone wall. Always have had.”

“You’ve got a stubborn kind of nature . . .” hazarded Wilfred.

“Oh, to hell with my nature!”

“Now my nature I suppose is light. . . .”

“Happy Wilf!” said Stanny.

Happy Wilf! Wilfred snatched at the phrase. It supplied the identity he was in search of. The moment it was spoken he recognized its truth, though up to that time he had regarded himself as among the unhappiest of mortals. This would necessitate the recasting of his whole scheme. It started a dozen rabbits in his mind. There was evidently an unhappiness to which he was a stranger. Was it worse not to be able to explain one’s unhappiness? And so on. These rabbits must be run down one by one later. Happy Wilf! Stanny had given him a character!

“What’s the matter?” whispered Stanny, alarmed by his silence.

“Nothing. What you said made me think. . . .”

Stanny snorted.

Wilfred, recollecting that he had Stanny to console, pulled himself together. “Things are buried way down in you,” he said. He heard the heavy tone in his own voice, and was dissatisfied with it. “That’s why it hurts when they struggle up. . . .”

“Oh, for God’s sake! I wish you wouldn’t always be trying to explain me to myself!” interrupted Stanny. “It’s a most irritating way that you have. . . . Things are not so easy explained. I’m like . . . I’m like a man standing with his back to the shore, and the waves breaking over his head!”

“I’m sorry,” whispered Wilfred. “I’ve got to be trying to explain things. I can’t rest with them. But you mustn’t mind what I say. I’m only . . . I’m only . . . what is the word? I’m only speculating. I don’t insist on anything.”

“You’re too young. . . .”

“Oh, I don’t think age has got much to do with it. I knew the same things when I was a child. Age only seems to bring you the words to put them to.”

“Words! Huh! They don’t explain anything.”

“It’s the same with books,” Wilfred went on. “You don’t learn much from books. In books you just seize on what has already been whispered to you.”

“Oh, for God’s sake! You’re beany!”

Wilfred clung to his arm. “I know,” he murmured. “Let me be that way with you. Let me let everything come out without having to watch myself, or be sorry for it afterwards. You’re my only safety valve.”

Stanny returned the pressure of his arm. “Oh, blow off as much as you want to,” he grumbled. “Don’t mind my cursing.” He struggled with what he had next to say: “The truth is . . . the truth is . . . I need you too. There is no curtain between us. . . . But I’ll never admit it again.” Then very gruffly: “And don’t think you have me explained with your literary phrases!”

“I don’t, really. All my life I’ll be speculating about you, without ever being sure of anything.”

“Well, don’t let me know you’re doing it, that’s all.”

When he opened his eyes in the morning, Stanny looked at Wilfred in horror. “My God! what a lot of rot we talked last night! We were drunk! For God’s sake forget it, Wilf!”

“Sure,” said Wilfred, grinning.



## PART THREE: YOUNG MEN

## PART THREE

### I

**I**MMEDIATELY upon the closing of the Stock Exchange at noon on Saturday, Theodore Dodge came to Joe Kaplan's office. Dodge was a stockbroker, who enjoyed the prestige of being known as the financial advisor, and representative on 'change of Cooper Gillett, present head of the famous old New York family. Joe was expecting a communication from that quarter. The Gillett millions had always been invested in New York real estate, but Cooper Gillett was interesting himself more and more in Wall street. Only a few people knew that it was Joe Kaplan who had introduced him to the excitements of that game.

Dodge plumped himself down, and without preamble said gloomily: "It closed two points higher."

Joe nodded, good-humoredly. All the strings of this affair were safely in his hands, and he had only to jerk a finger here and there, to make things come about as he wished.

"Of course the stock began to show strength as soon as I stopped selling," Dodge went on: "Everybody was watching me. I sent three messages to Cooper Gillett from the floor, and got no answer. Finally I left the floor, and went to his office. Keep and Shriver were with him. He was biting his nails in a blue funk. When I asked for additional orders to sell, he flew into a passion. 'I'm already short forty thousand shares of the damned stock!' he cried. 'Suppose she jumps five points more? I should be seriously embarrassed!'

"We all laughed a little at this," Dodge went on. "'Seriously embarrassed' sounded comic, coming from him. 'How about the rest of us?' said I. 'We have all put every cent we possessed into this.'

"The more fools, you!" he said.

"We followed you in," I reminded him.

"Yah! and now you look to me to get you out again!" he snarled. "I must throw away a million maybe, to save your paltry thousands!"

"I gave it to him straight, then. 'Look here,' said I, 'that's not the point. Never mind what we stand to lose. I'm your broker, and I'm supposed to give you honest advice. Well, here it is! Everybody knows you can't go into a deal like this, and stop half way. You might just as well stand on the

corner, and pitch your money down a sewer opening. As soon as I stopped selling for you, the stock began to rise. When it becomes generally known that you have released the pressure on it, it will rebound like a rubber ball. It won't be a question of five points rise then, but ten, and very likely twenty. You'll lose half a million dollars, and become a laughing-stock. I'll be ruined. . . .'

"'On the other hand,' I said, 'if you see the thing through, you *can't* lose! This is simply a duel between you and the Mattisons of Chicago. Well, you've got more money and more credit than that crowd. As yet, you haven't begun to touch your resources. You're bound to beat them out in the end. . . . Now what are my instructions for the opening on Monday?'

"But he only sat there glowering and biting his fingers. I couldn't get him up to the sticking-point. Your name was never mentioned, but we could all see that he wanted you to buck him up, and wouldn't admit it. You must see him to-day, Kaplan, or we'll all be in the soup. He's going out of town over Sunday."

"But I can't see him unless he sends for me," Joe objected. "If I go after him, he is bound to take the defensive, just as he did with you."

"He'll never send for you," said Dodge gloomily, "because he's ashamed to admit that a man as young as you has so much influence over him. . . . Couldn't you run into him as if by accident?"

"What are his movements?"

"The four of us are lunching at Martin's at one o'clock. After we've eaten, I'll steer them into the café. Anybody could drop into the café."

"But the three of you being there, he'd smell a rat for certain," said Joe smiling.

"You could cover your tracks; you're clever at that. . . . You *must* see him before he goes out of town!"

"Well, look here," said Joe. "I'll drop into Martin's with some other fellows, see? It will be up to you to make Cooper Gillett invite me to your table."

"Sure!" said Dodge, vastly relieved.

"And here's a piece of advice for you," Joe went on. "Don't give him an indigestion of the subject during lunch. On the other hand, you mustn't enter into a conspiracy of silence either, or *that* will make him suspicious. If the subject comes up, speak your minds on it, and let it drop again. Never nag a millionaire. That's my motto."

Joe came into Martin's by the Broadway entrance, at the heels of the two friends he had picked up for the occasion. On Saturday afternoons everybody who was anybody in New York desired to show themselves at Martin's, and the café was crowded. Joe was aware, as he passed down the room, that many heads were turned to follow him. He knew that they were beginning to call him "the Boy Wonder of the Street" and his heart exulted. Already he had succeeded in getting his head well above the ruck of the town.

He and his friends sat themselves down at a table against the back wall. The friends had their instructions. The three put their heads close together as if they had serious business to discuss, or some delightful plot to lay. Joe seemed not to see Cooper Gillett and his party who were seated at a larger table in the center of the room. In addition to Dodge, Gillett had with him Judge Keep, one of his attorneys; and Eddie Shriver, a young relative of his wife's.

Out of the tail of his eye, Joe perceived the eager resentment with which Gillett beheld *him*. He could almost hear the millionaire say: "There's the damned kid now! He don't appear to be worrying!" There was no occasion for Dodge to exercise any diplomacy; for Gillett immediately dispatched Shriver to Joe's table. Shriver was a good-looking young fellow with a blond beard, who did everything he was told.

"Mr. Gillett wants to speak to you," he said to Joe.

Joe started with pleased surprise. "Hello, Eddie!" Looking eagerly beyond him, he waved his hands to his friends at the center table. Many people in the place were looking at them. "Meet Mr. Cummings and Mr. Underwood . . . Mr. Shriver. I'll be with you in five minutes, Eddie. There are one or two things I have to settle with these gentlemen before they hustle for their train."

Joe kept the multi-millionaire waiting a good quarter of an hour. Then, after bidding an ostentatious good-bye to his young friends, he strolled over. Joe found the atmosphere of Martin's pleasantly stimulating. Before any of the quartet had a chance to speak, he said cheerfully:

"That was a nice little rise we had just before the close of the market."

This diverted what Gillett was about to say. He looked disconcerted.

Joe occupied himself with a cigarette. "I hope you all sold while the selling was good," he remarked.

"I'm already short forty thousand shares," grumbled Gillett.

"The shorter you are, the more money you'll make," said Joe.

"How about Monday?"

“She’ll rise a couple of points more. Sell every share you can find a buyer for! . . . It wasn’t such a bad move to hold off for awhile. You’ll have a better market, Monday, because of it.”

An uncertain look came into Gillett’s red face. Joe caused his own face to look wooden. The stockbroker lowered his eyes. He could see that the current was already setting the other way.

“How about that item on the news ticker to-day?” asked Judge Keep. “It was stated that our new machine, wouldn’t work.”

“And it won’t either,” grumbled Shriver. “I can’t do anything with it.”

“I instigated that story,” said Joe, flicking the ash off his cigarette.

Gillett stared. “What the deuce for?” he demanded.

“To bring buyers for Mattison’s stock into the market,” said Joe. “We can’t continue to sell the stock short if there are no buyers. The thing was beginning to stagnate.”

“But we got all our publicity on that new machine. . . .”

“What of it?” said Joe. “They can’t take it away from us now. A new invention is news, but the failure of a new invention isn’t news. We’ll tap new sources of publicity.”

“But suppose I gave the order to sell, and Mattison’s stock still rises on Monday?” said Gillett.

“An hour or two after the opening she’ll flop,” said Joe casually.

“How do you know?”

Taking a paper from his pocket, he spread it out on the table. It was the page proof of a Sunday article for the newspapers, embellished with photographs. Joe, grinning, read out the headlines:

“Cooper Gillett buys another big factory! The young financier hot-foot on the trail of the trust!”

“Me, young?” said Gillett grinning, too.

“It endears you to the public,” said Joe.

“I didn’t buy the factory. I only have an option on it.”

“What’s in a word! It ’ll all be forgotten in a couple of days. . . . This will appear to-morrow in five of the biggest cities in the country. A whole page, see? It recapitulates the story of our other three factories. . . .”

“Which have never manufactured anything . . .” put in Shriver.

“The public doesn’t know that.”

“Good God! how much is this going to cost me?” asked Gillett, rapping the paper.

“Not a cent,” said Joe, grinning. “That’s the beauty of it. The magic name of Gillett is always news, see? It’s been accustomed to the front page for four generations. And what’s more, trust-busting is now the latest popular sport, and we got in just right. Mattison is the trust, and we’re the noble champions of the down-trodden common people! We’ve got him in a position where he can’t fight back. This story will send his stock off four or five points. That’ll give you a chance to cover, if you’re scared. As for me, I mean to hold on for a week longer, if I can string the banks along.

“Mattison’s not at the end of his rope yet. By straining his credit, he’ll be able to maintain his stock at a decent level for another week. I’ve got another story for next Sunday, and then he’ll be done. The bottom will fall out of the Trust. We’ll make a killing! When that happens, you must not be contented with covering, but buy! buy! buy! Spread your orders through a dozen houses.

“Mattison will have to come to us, then. We will ask for a million of their stock to cease hostilities. Technically, of course, he will be buying out our company. A million for our four junk factories which have never manufactured anything, and the good will of our business—it is to laugh! This, together with what you’ve bought on the market, will give you a controlling interest in the trust, and you will then be elected director and vice-president and the stock will jump twenty-five . . . forty points! Gee! what a killing!”

Gillett turned to Dodge. “Look here,” he said, “you wanted instructions for Monday. Dump a block of five thousand shares on the market at the opening; and go on selling as long as you can find takers. I don’t set any limit.”

Broad smiles surrounded the table. Only Joe looked indifferent.

An uncomfortable thought occurred to Gillett. “I say,” he objected, rubbing his lip; “when it comes out that I have sold out to the Trust, and been elected a vice-president, it’ll put me in a rotten light with the public.”

“Oh, it’ll all be forgotten in a week,” said Joe smoothly. “—By everybody except Mattison. We’ll give the public something else to think about if you like. . . . Look here, if you want to stand well with the public, I’ve got another scheme. . . .”

His three hearers leaned toward him.

“There’s been too many Trust Companies formed under the new banking law. Some of them are damned hard up for business. We’ll pick on one of them, and let it be quietly circulated around that it’s in a bad way, see? A bank is very sensitive to that sort of thing. We can pick up whatever stock

comes into the market at a discount; and when our bank gets good and groggy—if there's a run on it, so much the better; you can step forward and deposit a million in cash. Think of the publicity! They'd elect you president or anything else you were willing to take; and the stock would jump twenty-five points. You'd be hailed in the newspapers as the savior of the institution, and incidentally make a handsome profit, see? . . . It's just as easy to work it one way as the other. . . .”

Business having been disposed of, the talk around the table slipped into undress. Joe, watchfully keeping all four of his auditors in play, made the running. He had diverse elements to deal with; for while Gillett and Dodge were frankly high livers, old Judge Keep was the pillar of some church or another; Eddie Shriver an easy-going young husband and father. Different as they were, they all yielded to Joe's insinuating looseness. Joe had a smiling way of taking the worst for granted that the most prudish of men found difficult to withstand. He worked to bring a certain sly, sheepish grin into the faces of his hearers; and when that appeared, he knew they were his.

Secretly, Joe was weary of his present audience. They were too dull; too old; his power over them was too easy to exert; they made him feel like a second-rate performer. Glancing around the room to see who was looking at him, Joe perceived that a figure, vaguely familiar, had taken a seat at one of the small tables by the Twenty-Sixth street windows. It was that kid, Wilfred Pell, the white-faced kid; the kid with the funny look in his eyes.

Joe was immediately interested. That kid had always teased his interest; it was hard to say why, because it was a footless sort of kid; he cut no ice. But Joe had never been able to make him give in. There was a bad streak in him all right; it instantly responded to Joe's suggestion; but the kid would not let himself go. Joe had never been able to make him look sheepish. Not that it mattered a damn; still . . . why hadn't he been able to?

Now he looked as untidy as ever in his wrinkled, mouse-colored suit; it might almost have been the same suit he was wearing three years ago; and with much the same look in his eyes, but intensified by growing manliness; a sort of crazy, proud, hot look—what *was* that look? If he felt like that, why the hell didn't he let himself go? Obviously a damn fool; one of these, morbid, solitary kids; rotten! But Joe couldn't dismiss him; there was something there that he couldn't get.

Joe saw that Wilfred had been watching him, though he quickly turned away his eyes when Joe looked. No greeting passed between the two. Wilfred's look made Joe purr with gratification. Funny, that this insignificant kid had that effect, when Cooper Gillett's ill-concealed admiration only bored him. What a contrast between the two of them. There was he, Joe,

handsome, elegantly-dressed; sitting as an equal with some of the best-known men in New York, telling them things: and there was that other kid, just the same age, untidy and sallow-cheeked, sitting alone and unregarded, looking out of place in the swell joint. And Wilfred showed that he felt the contrast. You could almost see him grind his teeth when he looked at Joe. The kid hated him, yet he was crazy about him in a way; while his mouth was ugly with a sneer, his eyes had a certain slavish look in them, that Joe was familiar enough with. Joe looked in one of the mirrors and plumed himself, aware that this would make the kid feel worse.

Joe now experienced a renewed zest in entertaining his table companions. As a careless youth to youths he related the surprising adventures of his hours of ease, making out that they were not at all surprising. When he wished to make a good impression, Joe never allowed himself to boast, but let it be assumed that the other man was quite as bold, shameless, insatiable and lucky as himself. His middle-aged listeners fawned upon him in gratified vanity. Joe never looked again, but was always conscious of the hot-eyed spectator in the background. Let the kid see how I can make the famous Cooper Gillett eat out of my hand, he thought.

“. . . She was dining with her husband at the next table. I had Millie with me. Millie and the husband were sitting back to back, and that left the peach, facing me, see? All through the meal she kept looking at me in a certain way; you know how they do. They love to do it when they're with their husbands. It's a slap in the old man's eye; and they feel safe when he's there. Don't expect to be taken up. But they don't usually do it when you've already got such a pretty girl as Millie with you. That suggested to me that the peach must be damn sure of her charms, and I was interested. She *was* a peach!

“Usually, Millie is a good-natured little thing; and I suggested that she follow the peach into the ladies' cloak-room, and make a date with her for me. But for some reason she got up on her ear—you know how it is with women; and refused. So I shook her. I timed it so's I came out on the sidewalk right behind the peach and her hubby. I marched up to her and raised my hat. Gosh! she near died. Didn't know which way to turn. But she was game. She recovered herself, and introduced me to the old man as Mr. Smithers. He was jealous as Hell. That made it twice as much fun, of course; you know! An old clothes-bag like that, hadn't any right to have such a pretty wife, anyhow.

“The old man had called a hansom, and she invited me to ride up-town with them—since I lived just around the corner from them, as she said. The old man made out to sit in the middle, but that just suited me, because he



had to sit forward a little, and the peach and I were able to talk sign language behind his back. And all the way up-town I need hardly say, she was real affectionate to him, pulling his ear, and rubbing her cheek against his shoulder. Isn't that like a woman? By God! if I ever get a wife, I'll recognize the danger signals! And she told him all about me, see? thus providing me with my cues. Oh! she was a clever little devil! When we got up to their flat, she sent him out to the delicatessen for bottled beer. . . ."

When the party at the round table broke up, they passed close beside Wilfred's table on their way to the Twenty-Sixth street door. Joe did not look at Wilfred; but was pleasantly aware of the look that the other cast upon him as he went by.

Outside, Joe's friends boarded cabs for their several destinations. Gillett and Keep went off together. Joe was left alone with a spice of anger in his breast. These men were willing to let him flatter them; willing to let him make money for them; but they never asked him home. However, the feeling quickly passed. To Hell with it! thought Joe; when I'm ready, I'll make my way into any house in New York!

For the moment he was at a loose end. He hesitated on the sidewalk. Where to find amusement? A recollection of that kid's queer look came back to him. Turning, he went through the doors again.

## II

ON SATURDAY afternoon, after a long prowling about the picturesque edges of Manhattan, Wilfred made his way to Martin's café. This was a treat he could occasionally give himself. It was rather awful to enter the place alone, but once you got your legs under a table, you sank into a comfortable insignificance. And what a scene for the connoisseur of humanity! he thought. Martin's was the center of New York life—not fashionable life, because that had moved up-town with Delmonico's; but fashionable people hardly counted nowadays; the best-known writers, artists, actors; men of the hour in every walk of life, frequented Martin's. And exquisite women! the flower of New York's women; who cared what their social status might be?

Wilfred could not meet the eye of one of these delicate creatures, but in his mind he explored them through and through. In his mind he experienced the gallant way of dealing with them. Sometimes when he overheard snatches of conversation at near-by tables, he burned to tell the whining male for the honor of his sex, that *that* was not the way!

On the present occasion when he looked about the rooms, he received an unpleasant shock upon beholding Joe Kaplan seated at a table in the vicinity, the center of a group of admiring older men. Oh Lord! can I never hope to escape him! thought Wilfred. The face of one of Joe's companions struck familiarly on his sight; a face that had been reproduced in the newspapers; handsome, dusky, florid; blurred a little by self-indulgence. Cooper Gillett, of course. It *would* be a multi-millionaire, thought Wilfred, sneering.

He saw that Joe's own style had improved very much. He had lost his too-sleek appearance. Joe, who was always learning, had discovered that the acme of good taste in men's dress was expressed in an elegant carelessness. He was wearing a suit of grey homespun, obviously made by the most eminent of tailors. His tie was of a soft silk, cornflower blue; and he had a knot of ragged cornflowers stuck in his buttonhole. His hair lay on his head like a raven's wing; his skin was as pink as a baby's; the teeth he revealed in his frequent smiles were as gleaming and regular as a savage's. What if his eyes were a little too close together? they sparkled with zest and good humor. Well, he could afford to be good-humored. He lived.

Twenty-three years old, and already at the top of the heap! A rich man, and the associate of rich men. He would never be obliged to grind his teeth in lonesomeness. That shameless smile of his would be devastating among women. Women loved to be yanked down from their pedestals, and quite right, too. How charming to yank them down. Half the desirable women in the place were looking at Joe now.

But *does* Joe live? Wilfred asked himself. He has no feeling. That's what makes him great. That's what gives him such a power over everybody. He doesn't care. That's what gives him such a power over me—God damn him! I feel, and he does not. He lives his life, and I feel it for him, and curse my own impotence! It is feeling which makes me so ineffectual. Feelings . . . all kinds of feelings that lay hands on me and drag me back! Oh God! I wish I could be a soulless animal like Joe! . . . And yet . . . what's the use of living a crowded life if you can't realize it? After all, isn't it more real to have the feeling than the substance . . . ? But down that path you soon begin to gibber! To hell with thought! I want the fleshpots!

He perceived that Joe was aware of him, though he gave no sign of recognition. A certain increased amplitude appeared in Joe's style. Wilfred sneered. It's nuts to him to have me looking at him, he thought; the fellow of good family who has come to nothing, gazing with sickly envy at the street Arab who has risen to affluence! By God! I will not look at him again!—But he could not help himself. His eyes were dragged back.

Meanwhile he sneered. Rotten little hooligan! He gets on because he's got no conscience. If a decent man can't get on in the world, so much the worse for the world! I don't envy him his present company; millionaires and their hangers-on! Those fellows are dead inside; that's why they like him. Even the warmth of a dung-heap is warmth! Scratch the pink skin and you'd find just a common, foul-minded Jew! Wilfred's thoughts seared his breast. He looked away from Joe in a despairing effort to divert his mind; but the animated spectacle in which he had hitherto taken such pleasure, no longer had any meaning for him.

When Joe and his party arose to leave, their course took them out beside Wilfred's table. Wilfred kept his eyes down until they had passed; then raised them to that hateful-enviable back. The tall grace of Joe's slim figure, so perfectly turned-out—he had put on a black soft hat, just enough out of the ordinary to emphasize his stylishness; the confident poise of his head; it seemed almost more than Wilfred could bear. Oh God! how I hate him! he thought; he poisons my being! Meanwhile the under voice was whispering: If I could only be him!

As Joe went through the door, a girl sitting at the last table, glanced up at him through her lashes. Wilfred had already marked her; she was the prettiest girl in the room; fragile as tinted china; a flame burning in an egg-shell. She wore an amusing little seal-skin cape with a high collar; and a smart black hat elevated behind, and tilted over her adorable nose. A fatuous old man was sitting opposite her.

Instantly Wilfred's burning fancy rearranged the scene. The girl was still sitting there with her inscrutable half-smile, but now Joe was opposite her all togged up to the nines, looking at her with insolent mastery. And Wilfred with money in his pocket, very well dressed, with that something in his air which showed that his grandfather had worn good clothes before him, came strolling in. As he passed their table, the girl raised her lovely speaking eyes. Their glances met and clung for an instant, and something passed between them that Joe would never know.

With ready self-possession, Wilfred turned to Joe, saying: "Hello, Kaplan, I didn't recognize you." Joe's greeting was stiff; but Wilfred, coolly ignoring that, said something humorous that caused the girl to giggle deliciously. She looked at Joe in a way that he could not ignore, and he was obliged to murmur churlishly: "Mr. Pell . . . Miss Demarest." (An assumed name of course; the enchanting and mysterious creature gave herself recklessly, while she looked for the man!) She offered Wilfred her drooping hand, not quite able to meet his eyes now, while she murmured: "Won't you sit down for awhile?"

Wilfred spoke of real things with a simple humor that showed up the cheap facetiousness that passed current at Martin's for what it was. A new look appeared in the girl's beautiful eyes. As in a flash, she had perceived the great truth, revealed to but few women: that it is the shy, imaginative men who are really the delicious rakes at heart; while the showy, flaunting fellow, the professional lady-killer is cold and shallow. . . .

Wilfred suddenly caught sight of Joe in the flesh, coming towards him. It was like an icy douche. . . .

To his astonishment, Joe stopped at his table. He said with his disarming grin:

"Hello, Pell!"

Wilfred mumbled in reply.

"I didn't speak to you before," Joe went on, "because of that gang I was with. They're gone now, thank God! and I can be myself." He dropped into the chair opposite Wilfred. "What you drinking? *Grenadine au Kirsch*? Nothing but apple water! Have an absinthe with me." He signalled a waiter. "Hey, *garçon! Deux absinthes au sucre.*"

Joe Kaplan speaking French! A yell of laughter inside Wilfred.

To have the effulgent Joe sitting opposite, attracting all eyes to their table, made Wilfred exquisitely conscious of the discrepancies of his own dress. Joe's brilliant personality beat him to the earth; he hated himself for being so easily overcome. He couldn't meet those hard bright eyes. He was full of indignation that Joe had presumed to sit down without waiting to be asked; and at the same time he was amazed that Joe deigned to notice him at all. Surely he could not be so insignificant as he seemed to himself if. . . . But vanity was slain by the hateful suggestion that it gratified Joe to sit there displaying the contrast between them to the assembled company.

How Wilfred writhed under that thought! Yet it would have been too ridiculous for him to get up and walk out of the place. He had not courage enough for that. He sat there, enduring it, until people forgetting them, looked elsewhere. Then curiosity began to burn in him, and he no longer wished to go. What a chance to learn the truth about Joe! If he could be induced to talk about himself; to reveal his commonness; it would destroy the absurd, splendid, evil creature of Wilfred's imagination, and cure his envy.

"Funny how we always run into each other," said Joe; "big as the town is! What you doing now?" He was only giving Wilfred half his attention; the black eyes were roving around.

"I work for the Exchange Trust," said Wilfred.

“Oh, Amasa Gore’s bank. Did he put you in there? I haven’t seen Gore for near four years. How is the old stiff? . . . And Dobereiner? And Harry Bannerman?”

“I don’t know,” said Wilfred. “I never go there.”

“Still living with the Aunts?”

“No. I have my own place now.”

“That’s what a fellow wants, eh? When he grows up,” said Joe with a good-humored, and infinitely suggestive grin.

Wilfred stiffened his face; but in spite of himself, his breast warmed a little towards Joe. There was a sort of infernal bond between them. Wilfred was a profligate too—that is, he desired to be.

The bottle and glasses were brought, each glass with a little silver fountain placed on top, through which the water dripped on the sugar, alternately side and side, with a fairy tinkle. Wilfred watched the operation fascinated. He tingled with pleasure at the thought of drinking the dangerous stuff. As the sugared water mingled with it, the green liquor mantled and pearly.

“A whole lot has happened since those days,” Joe went on. “I’ve ceased to be a pimp, and have become a stockjobber. It’s considered more respectable, I understand. Anyhow, it’s more profitable. Already I’m rich, but not as rich as I shall be. Wall street is easy picking for me. I’ll tell you why. The fellows down there have got the name of being the smartest on earth, and they know it, and that makes them careless, see? They’re so accustomed to doing others, they forget that they may be done, in their turn. Another thing; Wall street has got a bad name, and they’re always scared of what people will say. They want to be both pirates and pillars of the church. I got an advantage over them, because I don’t give a damn what anybody says, as long as I can keep out of jail. What was I? Just a kid out of the East Side gutters. I had nothing to lose. I’m a realist, I am. I think things through.

“Besides, I got a sort of gift of reading men. I don’t know how it is, but when I’m talkin’ to a man, I always seem to know the bad things he’s thinking about, and is afraid to let on. Some men look good, and some look bad; but it don’t matter how good a man *looks*, you can depend upon it, he’s got a secret badness in him, that he nurses. Everybody likes me because I’m so damn natural. Even the men I get the best of, come round. Morality is the curse of this country. Everybody is sick of it, really. That’s why an out and out bad actor like me becomes a sort of hero to everybody. You would never believe the things that respectable men tell me when they get a drink or two

in them. It's morality that perverts them. They feel they can let themselves go with me, because I got no morals. . . ."

Wilfred thought with a kind of enthusiasm: This is great stuff! I must remember it. He asked, shyly: "How about women?"

"Oh, women," said Joe carelessly, "they're a different proposition. I only know one thing about women, and that's all that concerns me. . . . There's no money to be made out of women. . . . I can tell you, though, women are a damn sight more natural than men."

Wilfred, afire with curiosity, had not sufficient effrontery to question him further.

Joe held his glass up to the light. "I'm crazy about this green stuff! My favorite poison! Makes your blood sting as it runs. Makes you feel like a king! I don't dare drink it when I got business on hand. Might do something reckless like telling a millionaire the truth."

Wilfred was disappointed with his first taste of absinthe. It was as mild and insipid as anise-seed drops. He had drunk half his glass, and it had had no effect whatever. All at once, he realized that he was enjoying its effect, without his having been aware of its coming on. His heart was lifted up. All his faculties were sharpened. He found himself able to look Joe in the face. Oh, wonder-working spirit! I shall drink absinthe every Saturday afternoon, he resolved.

Wilfred looked at Joe. After all, he's only a fellow like myself, he thought. He has his parts, and I have mine. He's a trafficker and I'm an artist. Would I change? Not likely! I can see a damn sight further into him, than he can into me. He sees that I have a sort of grovelling admiration for him in my blood; what he does not see is, that I despise him in my mind. . . .

A second absinthe followed the first.

"It's nice to have a fellow your own age that you can let go with," said Joe. "I get pretty sick of playing bright-eyes all the time to those old dubs I got to work."

"Haven't you any friends?" asked Wilfred with a secret satisfaction.

"Friends?" said Joe. "Hundreds! But all older men than me. Got no time for young fellows. They just fool. I'm a business man. . . . But damn it all! I'm only twenty-three. I like to cut loose once in a while without thinking what I'm saying. There are women of course, but they don't understand a man's thoughts. I can talk to you. From the first I felt there was something . . . that you and I understood each other."

Wilfred shivered internally. It's true, he thought; but by God! I'll never confess it to him! Rather to his surprise he found himself talking to Joe with

an impartial air.

“I’ve always been interested in you. You’re an extraordinary fellow. You remind me of Adam; or of an artificial man that I read about, who was created by a great scientist, and let loose on the world. A perfectly-functioning man, with no hereditary influences to restrain him. It gives you a terrible advantage over the rest of us.”

“Say, what are you driving at?” said Joe with a hard stare.

Wilfred smiled to himself. Got under his skin that time! However, he did not wish to quarrel with the man, but to explore him. In order to divert him, he said: “I’d like to hear about your Wall street operations.”

Joe’s annoyance passed. “Ah, to hell with my operations!” he said. “This is out of business hours. . . . I’d like to get good and drunk over Sunday. Are you on?”

Wilfred was sharply arrested by desire. What a chance! After that Joe would have no mysteries for him! But of course, a power outside his control shook his head for him. He heard himself saying primly: “Sunday is my working day.”

Joe was not sufficiently interested to enquire what he meant. “That’s a good-looking wench over here at my left,” he said; “the one with the black hat tipped over her nose.”

Wilfred was willing to meet him on that ground. “Out o’ sight,” he agreed. “Wonderful looking girls come here.”

“They ought to be,” said Joe; “highest-priced in town . . . let’s get a couple. . .”

An icy hand was laid on Wilfred, chilling the absinthe-engendered warmth. In spite of himself, he could not quite command his face. Joe chuckled.

“It’s easy fixed,” he said. “All you got to do is slip a bill to the waiter. You don’t even have to do that, because François will get a rake-off from the girls later. He has a list of their telephone numbers, see? He calls them up, and in a few minutes a pair of them will breeze in and say: ‘*So* sorry we were late!’ ”

Wilfred miserably shook his head.

“You don’t need to be afraid of them,” said Joe. “Just because they look like Duchesses. They wouldn’t be let in here if they didn’t. They’re just girls like any others. They’ll make it easy for you, when they see you’re green.”

This was bitter for Wilfred. “I’m not afraid of them,” he said quickly.

Joe laughed again. “Aw, come on,” he said.

"I'm not dressed. . . ."

"It don't matter," said Joe. "So long as you have the price."

"But I haven't," said Wilfred desperately.

"Oh Hell!" said Joe. "I didn't suppose you had. This is on me. . . . Look!" He produced a wallet from his breast pocket, and partly opening it, revealed a thick stuffing of crisp new yellow-backed bills. "That's my Sunday money. I'll go halves with you."

"I . . . I couldn't," stammered Wilfred, grinding his teeth.

"Why not? Money means nothing to me. I mean spending money. It would be fun to give you a swell, expensive time for once. You look as if you needed it. Come on; to-morrow's Sunday."

Wilfred thought: This is not generosity, but merely the desire to shine at my expense. He was almost suffocated with wounded pride. He could not trust himself to speak; but merely shook his head again.

Joe was enjoying his discomfiture. "Haven't you ever?" he asked, grinning.

"Sure!" lied Wilfred. "But I didn't buy it."

"Oh, sure!" said Joe. "Love. That's all right, too. But there's something about a pretty girl you never saw before, and never expect to see again . . . you don't give a damn, and she don't. . . . Look here, I'll lend you the money. You can pay me back." He held up a finger for François.

"You'll have to entertain them by yourself," warned Wilfred. "I won't stay!"

"Oh, to Hell with it, then!" said Joe, disgruntled.

When the waiter came, Joe asked for their bill. Wilfred insisted on paying for half the drinks, taking care to conceal from Joe how thinly his wallet was lined. They left the café in silence. On the pavement outside, Joe signalled for a cab, and Wilfred stiffly bade him good-bye.

Joe, grinning sideways at Wilfred, caught hold of his arm. "Wait a minute, fellow!"

Wilfred read that grin perfectly. His thoughts were bitter.

"Come along with me," Joe said. "I'm going up to see my girl—my steady girl I mean. Been going with her five years. Almost like an old married pair."

"Sorry, I can't," said Wilfred. "Some other time. . . ."

"Aw, come on. This is just a social call. She's a peach of a looker. She'll put you at your ease. . . ."



Wilfred detached his arm. "Sorry, I can't," he said. "Good-bye."

Joe, one foot on the step of the cab, called after him: "Say, Kid, it's time you grew up!"

Wilfred walked away quickly. Joe's parting shot rankled like a barbed dart. It was true! It was true! He had not yet become a man!

### III

JOE was rich enough now, to come out into the open. He had lately taken two rooms high up in the newest building on lower Broadway. The marble entrance hall with its uniformed attendants, and its ranks of velvet-running elevators, was the most imposing in town. It gave Joe a standing with the public to have his name listed in the telephone book; moreover, it pleased him to have men twice his age coming to see him hat in hand, and talking humble. They never got anything out of him; for Joe dug up his own business in his own way. In the outer room were installed a shiny-haired clerk, and a crisply-laundered stenographer; Joe's own room was furnished with waxed mahogany and a Bokhara rug. The windows looked out over the Upper Bay.

One morning, shortly after Joe had arrived at his office, the gentlemanly clerk (Joe would not have Jews about him; Jews around an office were too suggestive of sharp business) came in to say that an old woman wanted to see him.

"What have I got to do with old women?" asked Joe, with lifted eyebrows. "What sort of old woman?"

"A real poor old woman, Mr. Kaplan. I couldn't get anything out of her. Just said she wanted to see you. She must have seen you come in. She was here before, this morning."

"Even so, do I have to see her?" asked Joe with a hard look. He enjoyed putting the clerk out of countenance; a fair lad, prone to blush and to turn pale; the two of them were the same age.

"No, sir. Certainly not, sir. I'll send her away."

"Wait a minute," said Joe harshly. A slight uneasiness had made itself felt. The old woman had seen him come in, the clerk said; that sounded as if she knew him. "Let her come in," said Joe carelessly. "A beggar, I suppose."

When his clerk opened the door a second time, Joe beheld his mother. Oh well, he had always expected it to happen sooner or later. He saw in a glance that the old woman was stupid with terror, and that he should have no trouble with her. So it was all right. The clerk was disposed to linger.

Joe helped himself to a cigarette from the silver box on his desk. To the clerk he said carelessly: "Call up Mr. Mitchell, and tell him I will see him here at eleven o'clock."

The door closed; and mother and son were left looking at each other. Joe had the advantage, because the windows were at his back. He experienced no emotion at the sight of his mother. In eight years she had changed very much. That vigorous, peasant's frame was broken. Her face which had once had the strength of apathy, looked sodden now. Her clothes . . . Ugh! Joe hoped she would not sit down on one of his chairs. She seemed incapable of speaking; and Joe felt no inclination to help her out. It was a settled maxim with him, to make the other party speak first. He lit his cigarette with the greatest deliberation, and holding the lighted match high above the ash receiver, let it flicker down.

Finally she stammered: "I seen the name and the address in a newspaper. . . . I come round to see if it was my Joe Kaplan. . . ."

"Did you tell anybody in this building your name?"

She shook her head. "I do' want to make no trouble for you, Joe."

"What *do* you want?"

"Well, Joe. . . ." Speech failed her. With a falling hand, she indicated herself—then him.

Joe regarded her thoughtfully; whistling between his teeth.

After a silence, she began again. "Well, Joe . . . your fat'er is sick. He's got the consumption. He's like to die on me any day. . . ."

"Isn't that old geezer dead yet?" said Joe.

"It takes all I kin earn to buy him his medicine, and a bit for the two of us to eat. I can't save the rent. The landlord has pasted a notice on the door."

"Where's Lulu?" asked Joe.

"She left home when she was seventeen. I ain't seen her since."

"Well, you can't blame her."

"I ain't blamin' her."

"Was she good-lookin'?"

"Yes. . . . God help her!" murmured the woman.

"Oh, fudge!" said Joe. ". . . Where's the boys?"

"On the streets. They come home sometimes. I feeds them—if I has it."

"What do you want of me?"

"Well, Joe . . . we're your folks. . . ."

“Cut it out!” said Joe with a gesture. “I’ve been told often enough that I’ve got no natural feelings. All right; I’m not going to make out to have any now. Home Sweet Home never meant nothing to me but a place to git away from. As for my father. . . . Gee! it made me sore even as a young kid to think that I sprung from *that!* The dirty, whining Jew! I’d do something handsome for you, if you could prove to me he wasn’t my father!”

“You wouldn’t want him to be buried in Potters’ Field. . . .”

“Why not? The main thing is to get him buried. A dead man rests just as comfortable in Potters’ Field as in Woodlawn!”

“But the disgrace of it. . . .”

“Aah! talk sense to me!” cried Joe, screwing up his face in irritation. “I’m a realist! Do you know what that means? You used to be one yourself. What’s come over you?”

“I do’ know what’s come over me,” she muttered, wiping a hand over her face. “I don’t think about nothing no more. Don’t see no use in it. . . . I just go along. . . .”

“Well, I’ve climbed out of that pigsty!” said Joe. “All by myself, I climbed out. I don’t owe nothing to you!”

Without another word she turned to go.

“Wait a minute!” cried Joe, exasperated. “I didn’t say I wouldn’t do nottin’ for you. I just wanted to have it well understood you hadn’t no claim on me!”

She waited.

“I always been willing to help you out,” grumbled Joe. Something about the dirty, broken-spirited old woman seemed to make him so sore he couldn’t see straight. “Soon as I got money I went to Sussex street first-off, but you had moved away. One of the neighbors give me a number in Forsyth street, and I went there, but you had moved again, leaving no address. What more could I do?”

“We had to move often,” she murmured.

“Listen; I’m willing to keep you in comfort, on condition that you change your name, and keep away from me, see? Call yourself Cohen or Levy, or any common Jewish name. Go hire some nice clean rooms, and put in some new furniture. Get everything new, and just walk out of the mess you’re in and get a fresh start, see? Don’t tell anybody who knows you as Kaplan where you’re going. And if you want any comfort in your new life, you’d better not tell the boys.”

“Oh!” she stammered. “I couldn’t shake the boys, Joe! That wouldn’t be right, like.”

“Well, that’s up to you. As long as you have a dollar, they’ll bleed yeh!”

“I know . . . but when the old man goes, I’d be alone. . . .”

“All right. If the boys ever tried to make trouble for me, I’d know how to handle them. They can’t get money out of me by threatening to expose my past, because I brag about it, see? . . . As soon as you’re settled in your new rooms—Aw, take a regular nice flat with a kitchen and a bathroom and all; write to me under your new name, see? and send the address. I’ll fix it so’s a bank will send you forty dollars a week as long as either of you live. . . . I’ll give you the money now for the furniture and the first month’s rent.”

Over his desk he passed her a handful of crackling bills. The old woman drew back from them with a look of horror that made Joe laugh. “Here, take them,” he said. “They won’t burn yeh!”

“It’s . . . it’s too much!” she stammered. His harshness she had taken as a matter of course; his beneficence terrified her.

Joe laid the bills down on the edge of his desk. After a while she picked them up in tremulous hands. The old face began to work in an extraordinary manner. “Oh Joe . . .” she stammered. “Oh, Joe . . . !”

Joe ran a hand through his sleek hair. “For God’s sake, don’t turn on the waterworks here!” he said. “You never did that!”

“I’m broke, Joe!” she wailed. “I got no resistance no more!”

“Oh, for God’s sake!” cried Joe, striding up and down. “. . . For God’s sake when you get in your new place keep yourself clean! I suppose you’re too old to change your ways much, but you can keep clean! . . . Your face is dirty! . . .”

“Yes, Joe. . . . I gotta thank you, Joe.”

“Don’t make me laugh!” said Joe. “I’m no philanthropist! I want things fixed in a certain way between you and me, and I’m willing to pay for it. If you ever come around me again, the deal is off, see? Beat it now.”

But she lingered. She plucked up a little courage. “If you was to see the youngest, Joe. . . . He’s a smart kid. Something could be made of him. . . .”

“Then make it,” said Joe. “You’re his mutter. You’ve got money, now.”

“I t’ink he’s like you, Joe.”

“Useless!” said Joe, grinning. “You can’t touch my heart. . . . I couldn’t do nothing with a boy off the streets.”

“That’s what you was.”

“Exactly! And nobody couldn’t do nothing with me. I did it for meself!”

“Don’t you want to see the old man before he goes?”

“What for? When he was well the sight of him used to make *me* sick!”

“Well . . . good-bye, Joe. . . .”

“Easy with the Joes when you open the door!”

“I’ll be careful. When I write I’ll put Mr. Kaplan. . . .”

## IV

THE four friends drifted out into the street from Ceccina’s. Linking arms, they paraded towards Sixth avenue, singing. Binks had to be put in the middle because he wobbled at the knees. Stanny and Jasper each had a good edge on, too. Jasper was gloriously released. Wilfred observed them enviously. I can drink like a fish, he thought, and it has no effect whatever!

They made a round of their favorite resorts; the Grapevine; Maria’s; Mould’s over on University Place. Wilfred tossed down more fiery potations than the *vino de pasto* of Ceccina’s. It only intensified his self-consciousness. I’ll never be able to carry it through! . . . You *shall* go through with it! He was ceaselessly plotting how he could shake his friends without exciting ribald comment. As they became really drunk that offered no difficulty. But how dear they became to him! How he hated to leave them! . . . I really ought not to leave them now. I’ve got the only cool head in the party. They might get into serious trouble. Some other night I’ll start out alone and . . . Come off! You’ve *got* to go through with it!

In the end he found himself alone without knowing exactly how it had come about. I must be getting drunk! he thought hopefully. But no! the surroundings were still bitten into his consciousness as with acid. The trees of Union Square, misshapen like rickety children, and tragic in the bareness of November; the ugly statue of Lincoln on the corner that he had passed a thousand times without ever seeing it; the green electric cars creeping like worms around the double curve; and that endless, dingy press of people that shuffled back and forth on the south side of Fourteenth street every night in the year. Such dulled and flaccid faces! Why were they deader than the faces on other streets? Why did they crowd together on the one sidewalk, leaving the other empty?

Wilfred went east on Fourteenth street. That stretch of Fourth avenue between Union Square and Cooper Square was devoted after nightfall to the traffic in which he was resolved to share. He turned into Fourth avenue with a wildly beating heart. It was not crowded here; just a few figures furtively

veering and hauling on their way. The shop windows were dark, except those of the dazzling saloons on every corner.

Wilfred's tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. How can I choose when I'm so shaky? he thought. What do you say to them at first, anyway? What a pitiful fool I should appear if I tried to address one with a thick tongue! I'll never be able to go through with it! . . . You *shall* go through with it! Wilfred perceived a young woman approaching, with her eyes fixed on him. In blind panic he stopped, and made believe to be attracted by something in a shop window. It was a cobbler's window, quite dark, with nothing in it but a row of run-over shoes to be mended.

An arm was slipped through Wilfred's arm, and a voice murmured in his ear: "Hello, sweetheart!" Wilfred turned a pair of terrified eyes. She was not bad-looking; a Greek girl perhaps; dark and opulent. Her face was not painted. Her glance was fairly open—at least she had not the leer that Wilfred so dreaded. He felt himself like putty in her experienced hands, and was relieved. This is not as bad as I expected; he thought. A price was named, and certain conditions laid down. This part seemed very unreal.

The next thing Wilfred knew, he was being shepherded up a steep straight flight of stairs over a saloon. There was a red carpet on the stairs, sooty on the edges, and worn threadbare in the middle. At the top of the steps stood a desk; a dog-eared hotel register lay upon it. A young waiter appeared from somewhere; and collecting a dollar from Wilfred, shoved the register towards him to be signed. Wilfred wondered about the waiter. A fellow his own age. Though his white suit was much soiled, he was not uncomely, with his stiff blond hair sticking up on his crown like a schoolboy's.

The waiter whisked them into a bedroom close at hand, and shut the door. Wilfred drew a long breath to steady himself. There he was alone in a bedroom with a woman he had never seen until five minutes before, and who was already preparing to reveal herself. How amazing! One swift glance around, and the common room was photographed on his brain forever. The cheap yellow bureau just inside the door, where Wilfred stood frozen, one hand resting upon it. He could see himself from the outside as if the eyes of his soul were suspended under the ceiling. Stretched across under the window, the bed, because there was no other possible place for it; in the corner behind Wilfred, the washstand; two chairs—all of the same ugly yellow wood. The bed was covered with a soiled white spread which still bore a significant impress in the middle. Wilfred wondered if the impress was still warm.

Wishing to do the thing in good style, he had ordered drinks; and they were now brought; cocktails with a red cherry in the bottom of each glass. Wilfred looked at the young waiter again. He put the tray on the bureau, and departed without looking at Wilfred. He had an extraordinarily inscrutable air; he had taught himself to see nothing; to give nothing away. What a queer job for a lad, popping in and out of the bedrooms! Wilfred wondered if he had ever been out in the country. How many rooms were there in the place? All occupied no doubt. He listened.

He indicated one of the drinks to his companion. He would not carry it to her, for fear of betraying the trembling of his hand.

“Much obliged, fella,” she said politely, “but I don’t indulge. Drink ’em both yourself. You kin understand if I drank with every fella, I’d be paralyzed before morning.”

Good God! thought Wilfred. “How many?” he asked involuntarily.

“Aah, fergit it!” she said, perfectly good-tempered. “What do you look at me like that for?”

Wilfred, abashed, schooled his eyes, and started slowly to undress. He had no feeling of shame; but only of strangeness.

His companion chattered away. She was rather a likeable sort. “It’s the drink that does for girls. So I keep away from it. The rest don’t do you no harm, if you take care of yourself. You kin depend upon me, fella. My name’s Angela. I ain’t been at this long. I started it so’s I could help me mutter out, and keep me young sister in school. She’s smart. We’re gonna send her to college. You’re a nice lookin’ fella. Is this the first time?”

“No,” said Wilfred quickly.

“Bet it is, though I kin tell. None of them wants to admit it. Well, you might do worse than begin wit’ me. You look somepin like my fella. He’s blond, too. But he’s got twenty pounds on you.”

Wilfred had heard that these girls always had a lover. That seemed strange to him.

“He’s a deckhand on the steamboat *Albertina*. . . .”

I share with a deckhand! thought Wilfred.

“He gimme this ruby ring I wear. If you come to see me at my place I’ll show you his pitcher. Me and him’s gonna git married when I kin save enough to furnish wit’.”

Good God! thought Wilfred again. “Does he know?” he asked.

Angela’s big, good-humored face was momentarily disfigured by a scowl. “What the hell is it to you? . . . Aw, . . . fergit it! . . . What you look at

me like that for? Come on.”

But Wilfred stood still. His feet were weighted down.

“What you waiting for? What’s the matter wit’ me, you look like that? Come on. . . .”

Wilfred went towards the bed like an automaton. He looked at her. After all there was nothing astounding in her unveiling. It was just a human body, the complement to his own; one was instinctively familiar with it. He recognized dispassionately that it was a generous, comely woman’s body, without blemish. He was reminded of fruitfulness; it was a body fit for Ceres, for Eve. What lovely, dimpling hollows! what a magical texture in woman’s skin!—But it didn’t seem to matter. What mattered terribly, and made him tremble, was the strangeness of the soul that inhabited this woman’s body, sending him such queer intimations through her eyes, all the while her tongue was so glib and matter-of-fact. Their bodies might press together as one, but their souls were sundered by an immensity of space. . . . How piteous!

“What you look at me like that for, fella?”

Once more Wilfred stood in front of the bureau with one hand upon it, his head lowered. Angela was busy in the corner behind him. He did not feel that anything of moment had happened to him. He was not changed. . . . Was *that* all? . . . But, no! He had failed; that’s what it meant. He was not human enough to take fire and burn in the beautiful human way. He was just a sort of figment of a man; an hallucination. He fulfilled himself only in imagination. Faced with reality, he dissolved. A dreadful fear gripped him. It was like falling through space. His hand tightened hard on the edge of the bureau, as if to convince himself that here was a real flesh and blood hand gripping palpable matter. . . . The edge of the bureau was blackened by many cigarette burns. The men who had laid those cigarettes down, *their* bodies had burned!

The girl came, and passed an arm around his shoulders. “You’re a wonderful fella!” she murmured. “I like you.”

Oh, yes! thought Wilfred. Flattery is a part of her business.

On the hand that lay on the bureau, Wilfred sported an antique ring of no great value. She turned it round on his finger. “Give it to me for a keepsake, fella,” she whispered cajolingly.

Wilfred thought: She knows that normal men have a moment of tenderness now. But not me. I feel nothing. He shook his head, and drew



away from her.

“Don’t you like me?”

“You’re all right!” said Wilfred.

She tried to wheedle more money out of him. Wilfred shook his head.

“Well, will you come to see me again?”

“Sure!” said Wilfred.

She slipped a card into his hand. “That’s my home address. It’s nicer there than these Raines Law joints. If you come in the afternoon I can give you more time. . . .”

Wilfred walked home, musing. His brain was active and cool. From a point at a little distance outside himself, he surveyed the scene in the hotel bedroom, and grinned. The girl’s attitude had been absolutely right of course. Matter-of-fact was the only thing to be under those circumstances. It was he, who had played the mountebank. . . . What comical little insects human beings were! . . . Well, it had been a richly humorous experience, and it had taught him a lot. He was glad it had happened. . . . But never again! Might as well make up his mind to it, that he was different in that respect from other men.

Inside the door of his own room, another mood was lying in wait for him. He loved that room; everything in it had been chosen by himself. It was on the ground floor at the back of what had been a fine dwelling in its day. There was a noble fireplace with a mantel of black marble. The fire, burning low, filled the room with comfortable warm shadows. Desire struck into Wilfred’s breast like a dagger.

Ah! if there was a dear girl waiting *here* for me! he thought. One whose heart I knew, and who knew my heart! How sweet before the fire to take her in my arms and kiss her neck; to . . . .

Wilfred’s veins were full of molten fire then; his head whirled giddily. He burst out laughing. Here you are at your imaginings again . . . !

## V

**J**OE KAPLAN was walking up lower Broadway, hugging himself within an expensive overcoat. Catching sight of his shining eyes and wreathed lips in a mirror, he thought: Picture of a man who enjoys life! Well, everything was going fine with him. He put down his feet deliberately, for it suited his humor to affect the solid air of an established man of thirty-five—but his heels were light.

Passing the Union Trust Building, his attention was attracted by a slender figure, who, with self-consciously averted head, sought to hurry by him unseen. Joe caught the man's shoulder and swung him around.

"Bristed!" he cried. "How are you!"

The other, held in Joe's grip, showed his teeth painfully; scowled; turned red; said nothing. Joe saw that he would have liked to strike him, but was too civilized. Six or seven years older than me, thought Joe; but a child in my hands! One of those white-headed boys with rich blue eyes like a picture—and like a picture, with nothing behind it. But this pup had one merit; he had not yelped when he was held up by his tail.

"Come and have lunch with me," said Joe.

"Thanks, I don't care to," said Bristed stiffly.

"What the hell!" said Joe. "That's ancient history. . . . I was just thinking about you. Or rather, I was casting about in my mind for somebody like you. You lost out through me once; well, now you got a chance to make through me."

"I've had quite enough of you," said Bristed bitterly.

"Don't be a fool. Come and have a good lunch with me at the Savarin. That commits you to nothing."

Bristed's blue eyes sought out Joe's black ones. "You know I think you're a scoundrel," he said quietly.

Joe was not in the least put out. "That's all right," he said laughing. "Now you've put yourself on record, there's no reason you shouldn't take a lunch off me."

"All right. I'll come," said Bristed.

They continued up the street together. Joe warmed on the outside by the overcoat; and inside, by the sense of well-being, discussed the morning's news of the Street. Bristed said nothing. Joe, without ever looking at him, was aware how he was biting his lip, and darting painful and envious looks like adders' tongues at Joe's profile. Joe had that effect on young men. It stimulated him. This young man gave Joe no concern. A slack-twisted skein, he was thinking; I could sell him out twice over, and still he wouldn't be able to stand out against me, if I wanted to use him again.

Once inside the expensive restaurant, Bristed began to lose something of his pinched air. This is like coming home to him, thought Joe. The *maitre-d'hotel* remembered him. "How do you do, Mr. Bristed. It is a long time since we have had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Yes, I've been travelling," said Bristed carelessly.

Joe rubbed his upper lip to hide a grin.

Joe ordered a choice little meal, and a bottle of Johannisberger. Bristed was impressed, but would not show it. Joe was becoming an adept in menu cards; and was prouder of this accomplishment than of his greatest coup on the Street. He himself, never over-ate; there were too many swollen paunches surrounding him down-town. He liked too well, the feeling of being twenty-three and on his toes. Besides, he went in for other pleasures.

When at last they lighted up their Eden perfectos, Joe said: "Gosh! when I was a brat in Sussex street, I never expected to be burning these!"

Bristed betrayed no interest in his reminiscences. "What do you want of me this time?" he asked bluntly.

"Keep your shirt on," said Joe coolly. "This is not financial. I'm already making money faster than I can hire safety-deposit boxes."

"What is it then?"

"I'm going into society."

Bristed laughed unpleasantly.

Joe did not mind, because it was not assured laughter. Bristed knew quite well that Joe *could* go into society if he wanted to. "There's plenty of society already open to me," Joe went on; "but I'll have nothing short of the best. The real top-notch. I've got money enough already to support the position; and in a few years, if I live, I'll be one of the big half dozen of this burg."

"I don't doubt it," said Bristed bitterly. "You're marked for it. . . . Do you think I am able to help you get into society?"

"None better," said Joe. "Your father, and his father before him were in the forefront."

"Sure!" said Bristed. "My grandfather had the distinction of making money, and my father of spending it. But what have I got?"

"The family name," suggested Joe.

"Sure! And an old house on Thirty-sixth street that we can't afford to heat properly in the winter; and where my mother and sister do their own housework."

"But the best society in New York is open to you, if you had the money to take your place in it. The old society. That's what I have my eye on."

"And where are we going to get the money?" asked Bristed.

"From me."

"No! by God!" said Bristed. "We haven't fallen as low as that!"

“Go ahead!” said Joe smiling. “Shoot off your fine sentiments, and then we’ll get down to business.”

Bristed became incoherent in his indignation. “What do you think I am? Do you think I’d lend my mother and sister to. . . There are some things you don’t understand smart as you are. Ah! I’m not going to talk to you. . . !” He stood up.

“Sit down,” said Joe quietly. “You can always turn me down, you know. Only a fool turns down a proposition before he hears it.”

Bristed sat down looking rather like a fool.

“Now, briefly,” said Joe, “without any skyrockets or red fire, what is the objection?”

“Do you think we’re going to foist you off on our friends . . . ?”

“Easy!” said Joe. “There’s not going to be any foisting. You ought to know me. Wherever I go, I stand on my own bottom. I say to everybody: Eight years ago I was a dirty little ragamuffin on Sussex street. My father and mother made their living sewing on pants for a contractor. When I was hungry I stole things off the pushcarts to get me a meal.”

“It pays to tell that, eh?” sneered Bristed.

“You’re dead right, it pays,” said Joe. “The idea it suggests to the other person is: Look how far he’s risen! I never made any pretences. Don’t have to. That’s how I get along. People think it’s original. Everybody likes me except those who have lost money through me. If you could only see it, it’s your fine sentiments that keep you down. Bet your grandfather wasn’t troubled with them.

“Take this scheme that I propose—you wouldn’t exactly have to beat the drum for me, you know. I’m fairly notorious. The Boy Wonder of the Street. Folks high and low are curious to have a look at me. I’d be a social asset instead of a liability. I’ve noticed that family, blue blood and all that, don’t cut as much ice as they used to. Those people, having bored each other stiff, are now beginning to look around for a little outside entertainment . . . Of course I could climb up anyhow. But I don’t care to take the trouble to lay a regular campaign. Prefer to begin at the top . . . I like the girls up there,” he added grinning; “they’re so damned independent. Like me!”

“Damn you!” said Bristed under his breath.

“Keep the change!” said Joe cheerfully . . . “How much would it take to keep up your house in good style?”

“It’s not a big house,” muttered Bristed. “Ten thousand a year.”

"I'll make it twelve thousand," said Joe. "And what's more, I'll settle a good round sum on your mother in the beginning, so that when I no longer need you, she wont be left flat."

"And what would we have to do, exactly, to earn it?" asked Bristed, sneering.

"Just have me to your house, and have your friends there to meet me. After that I stand or fall by my own efforts."

"Everybody would know where the money came from."

"And why the Deuce shouldn't they know? That's what people like you can't see! Tell the truth about the whole affair. Tell everybody. Then they'd begin to respect you . . . There'd be a lot of benefits to you in addition to the twelve thou. If you and your folks took your rightful place, you'd have a chance to look around yourself, eh? and . . ."

"No thanks!" said Bristed violently.

"Oh, of course you wouldn't sell yourself," said Joe dryly. "But she might be a damn fine girl, though rich. It *has* happened. I tell you straight, Bristed, it's your only chance. You haven't got the guts to make good in the rough and tumble of the Street. You're too gentlemanly. Then there's your sister . . ."

"By God . . . !" said Bristed with burning eyes.

"Keep your hair on," said Joe coolly. "That is not a part of my plans."

"Don't you mean to marry?" sneered Bristed.

"If I do, I shall look higher," said Joe, facing him down. ". . . However, I mean to thoroughly canvass the field first. I don't want money of course. I mean to marry a girl of the very highest position who hasn't got too much. But she's got to be a regular top-notch!"

"I won't have anything to do with it!" said Bristed.

"Put it before your family," said Joe, undisturbed. "You owe them that. Tell them the worst you know about me. If they want to look me over before committing themselves, all right. Then if they turn me down, why that's all right, too. I can easy find somebody else."

"Well, I'll tell them," said Bristed. "But I'll advise them against it."

"That's all right, old man," said Joe. "I have confidence in the ladies. They are always realists."

ILFRED was washing himself at the basin in his little dressing-room. He bit his lip to keep back the whistle that naturally issued at such a moment, because he had found that if he kept quiet in there, the girl in front would sometimes come into her dressing-room which adjoined. In the old house there had been a pantry running across between the two rooms, and this had been divided by the flimsiest of partitions. When he was on his side and she was on hers, it was almost as though he were in her company. She was a little brown girl, delicately rounded, with an innocent, gentle, provoking air, and a skin like peaches and cream. How delicious it was to picture her washing at her basin while he was washing at his!

Wilfred had never spoken to her. She had a husband. The pair of them excited a warm interest in Wilfred because they were so young. A mere boy and girl and they initiated so much further than he was! Once he had had a glimpse into their room as he passed the door. It was distressingly bare; nothing but a bed. Evidently one of these imprudent runaway matches. He, considering himself a prudent person, was charmed by imprudence in others. Yet Bella Billings the landlady, hinted that already things were not going well in the front room. The husband, a sulky-looking blond lad with an unwholesome complexion, was a telegrapher who worked all night, and slept in the daytime. Thus the little wife was thrown much into Bella's company. A well-meaning creature, Bella, but rabid in her emotions; hardly the best advisor for a discontented girl wife.

Thus Wilfred's thoughts as he held his head close to the water to avoid a noisy splashing. As he straightened up, groping for his towel, a murmur of voices from the front room reached his ears. It came from the direction of the bed. Wilfred became very still, and his heart beat faster. What did a boy-husband and a girl wife say to each other in bed?

No words reached his ears; but the sense of the murmuring was very clear; the girl beseeching, the lad's surly voice denying.

Wilfred, blushing all over, retreated into his main room with the towel about his head. He was filled with a delighted astonishment. He had never guessed that the sort of girl a man aches for might in turn ask. He had supposed that such a one merely suffered a man to love her out of her kindness. The discovery that a woman might be both desirable and desiring seemed to change the color of life. He silently addressed the front room: "Oh, if you were mine!"

That was all. A day or two later, as Bella had foretold, the establishment in the front room suddenly broke up. The young telegrapher went off to take a job in the Southwest, while his wife returned to live with her mother in a

Connecticut town. Wilfred did not forget her. In his dreams he invited her. The fact that she had been married lent her an added seductiveness. He led Bella on to talk of her. It transpired that they kept up a correspondence. Her name was Mildred.

Bella Billings was draping herself ungracefully in the doorway of Wilfred's room. For reasons of propriety she would never come all the way in. His room, being on the ground floor, was convenient to stop at. She liked Wilfred, perhaps because he allowed her to talk as long as she pleased. Few of her lodgers would. Wilfred found her conversation no less tiresome than the others did, but kept himself up with the reminder that he was a literary man, and Bella undoubtedly a character. She talked with a wasteful expenditure of breath that left her gasping halfway through a sentence, but unsilenced; and a display of pale gums that slightly shocked Wilfred. It seemed to him that he had never seen anything so naked as Bella Billings' gums.

She was an institution on the South side of Washington Square. Everybody had lodged with her one time or another. In addition to letting rooms unfurnished without service, she conducted a manufacturing business in a rear extension to her house. "Stella Shoulder-Brace Co." the brass plate at the door announced; but "shoulderbrace" was a euphemism; what she made were various artificial contours for the female form. These objects were shaped on strange machines in the back premises like parts of iron women, polished. Bella—everybody south of Fourteenth street called her Bella behind her back—also painted Newfoundland dogs and cupids after Bouguereau in oils upon red velvet panels.

Her subject at the moment was pernicious anæmia from which she had been a sufferer. She was describing to Wilfred how her fingernails and toenails had dropped off. Wilfred had heard it before; but was rendered patient by a design of using Bella for his own ends. As soon as an opening presented itself, he said carelessly:

"Only six days to Christmas! What are you going to do to celebrate, Miss Billings?"

Deprived of the support of her discourse, Bella blinked uncertainly. "Well . . . I don't know," she said with a giggle. "I suppose I'll do nothing as usual."

"Everybody ought to have a big time, Christmas," suggested Wilfred.

Bella took a fresh pose in the doorway. "I've kinda got out of the way of social life," she said. "Being so devoted to my art, and all."

“Why don’t you give a party?”

“Ohh!” said Bella breathlessly, “I don’t know people well enough to give a party.”

“You would before the party was over,” said Wilfred. “That’s what a party’s for.”

“I don’t know enough people to ask.”

“Small parties are the best. You know some girls.”

“Oh, there wouldn’t be any fun in a hen party.”

“I’ll tell you what let’s do,” said Wilfred; “let’s give a joint party during Christmas week, you and I. You ask the girls and I’ll bring the fellows.”

Bella’s eyes widened, and she uncovered the pale gums. Then she nodded until Wilfred thought her head must snap off. “All right!” she said panting. “But why bother about any more girls? I’d love to entertain your friends.”

“Oh, we must have enough girls,” said Wilfred quickly. “If there was only one, the fellows would get to quarrelling.”

“Will Stanny come?” she asked breathless and giggling.

“Sure!”

“He’s my favorite. He’s so wistful. I always wonder what he’s thinking about when he looks so wistful.”

“Maybe his corns hurt,” said Wilfred. This was the line to take with Bella.

“Oh, Mr. Pell, you’re so cynical! . . . Who else will you bring?”

“Just Stanny and Jasper; the others will be out of town.”

“I must ask the two boys from the top floor.”

“Oh, them!” said Wilfred. “How about the girls?”

“Well, there’s Hattie Putzel,” said Bella. “Her brother’s on’y a bootblack, but you would never know it from her. A real stylish girl. And there are the two Scotch lassies I met in the restaurant where I eat sometimes. Regular little ladies, they are. Name of McElderry.”

“That’s four, counting yourself,” said Wilfred, “against five fellows. Must have another girl.”

“Well, let me see . . .” said Bella.

He waited breathlessly.

“There’s that Maud Morrison who used to be my forelady in the shop . . .”



Wilfred was obliged to show his hand. "Do you think that Mildred would come?" he suggested offhand.

"Now that's a good idea!" said Bella. "The poor little thing must be having a dull time living at home. A wife who is no wife! I might keep her here with me a couple of days Christmas. I'll write to-night."

Wilfred started to brush his coat, whistling softly. He was aware that he must be looking exceedingly self-conscious. Fortunately Bella was not perspicacious; her mind was busy with plans.

"I'll get a gallon of Marsala wine from the Eytalian in Thompson street. You and me can go halves on it. I'll get the girls to bring sandwiches. Charley works for a commission merchant; he can bring apples . . ."

Wilfred, Stanny and Jasper, having dined at Ceccina's, made their way across Washington Square. Stanny and Jasper were calm and anticipatory; Wilfred was tormented by an anxiety that he did not confide in his friends. Up to that morning Mildred had left Bella in doubt as to her coming. Wilfred had staked everything on her. Suppose she did not come? Cinders; ashes; dust!

They went into Wilfred's room to leave their hats and brush their hair. From Bella's room in the rear extension, came the sounds of a discreet little company. When they entered Wilfred could scarcely bear to raise his eyes to look. Ten people crowded the room to suffocation. Yes! and there she was, sitting in the farthest corner, her lashes sweeping her flower petal cheeks. A great wave of relief and laughter surged in Wilfred's breast. What a joke that she should look so virginal! You darling! if you knew what I know about you! he thought. He could not meet her eyes.

It was a squeeze in Bella's room which was crowded before anybody entered it; and at first an awful constraint settled upon them. No one said anything except the nervous Bella, whose occasional squalls of talk seemed to be lost in a vacuum. The girls just sat, looking aggravatingly refined; and the young men stood holding up the walls with their backs. Wilfred began to sweat gently; he felt responsible. Neither Jasper nor Stanny was disposed to help him out. Jasper squinted down his nose; and Stanny looked obstinately mournful. Wilfred blamed the two men from up-stairs. They didn't belong. Charley was a lean and sprawling youth; Dave a dark and solid one. Boors, thought Wilfred.

Finally in desperation, Wilfred said: "Let's go into my room. It's bigger."

The girls decorously shook out their skirts and prepared to follow.

Things began to go a little better. Wilfred had a bottle of cherry brandy that he circulated with trembling hands. There was but one liqueur glass to each two persons, and that helped to break the ice. The guests began to circulate and pair off. Hattie Putzel and Jasper found each other out. Hattie was a handsome, dark girl with a great deal of manner. It was impossible to believe that her brother was a bootblack. During the whole evening, Jasper kept his arm around Hattie's waist without, so far as Wilfred could see, ever exchanging a word with her. However they seemed to understand each other. Stanny got one of the little Scotch girls, but Bella was continually organizing cutting-out expeditions.

Mildred sat by herself shy and demure. Wilfred, electrically conscious of her, had not yet dared to approach. Nevertheless there were mute exchanges. Wilfred was aware that her demureness was addressed to him. It seemed to be clear to everybody present that this was a case; and no other fellow tried to interfere.

When the cherry brandy was finished, the hospitable Bella produced her gigantic demijohn of Marsala. During the rest of the evening the demijohn never left the crook of her arm. "*La Vivandière*" Stanny dubbed her. Bella was wearing a dress made by herself of red flannel with black crescents printed on it. Half beside herself with giggling, panting excitement she was such a ludicrous figure as to make them all self-conscious. They scarcely liked to look at her. However, by degrees the party became animated and noisy; and Wilfred felt no further concern for the outcome. Wilfred and Mildred kept apart, glancing at each other with sidelong eyes.

Bye and bye Charley invited the crowd up to his room. As they swept up-stairs, Wilfred and Mildred came together at the tail of the procession. In the semi-darkness of the hall, out of sight of the others, Wilfred felt more confidence.

"Hello!" he whispered.

"Hello yourself," she whispered back.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come to-night!"

"Bella told me you wanted me to come."

"Funny we shouldn't meet until after you had moved away."

"I used to wonder about you."

The darling! She had wondered about him!

She slipped her arm through his like a little girl, and Wilfred pressed it. Something broke loose in his breast. He roared up through the house: "Clear the track for we are coming!" And galloped up the stairs, dragging the

laughing and protesting Mildred after. Only once or twice in his life had Wilfred found his whole voice like that.

On the last dark landing she pulled back a little. He got it. His eager arms went around her with a will. He crushed the slender delicious body against his own. Ah! what a moment! To close his arms about his dream, and find them full! To be assured that he was no sprite, but a man like other men! Their lips hungrily sought each other in the dark. Again and again! Never should he get enough! Oh woman! Oh mystery of delight! Oh terrifying feast to be halved with a hungry stranger!

They entered the lighted room carefully apart from each other; subdued and highly self-conscious. A roar of laughter greeted them. They blushed scarlet, but rather enjoyed it. Mildred made haste to lose herself amongst the girls. The dignified Stanny tempted Wilfred. Seizing his hands, Wilfred whirled him about like a dervish.

“Have you gone crazy?” said Stanny, affronted.

Stanny was not having a good time. He desired to shine in the eyes of the little Scotch girl, and that ridiculous, ogling Bella was making him look like a fool! In some sort of hand-holding game that they all played, Bella, pretending to be insulted, accused Stanny of having tickled her palm. Stanny’s sense of humor was not equal to it. Pure hatred glittered in his eyes, as he denied the charge. Wilfred will never forget the picture made by Bella in the red flannel dress, sitting in the middle of the floor with her toes sticking up, embracing the mighty demijohn, and coyly expressing a hope that no gentleman would take advantage of her condition. None did.

Hunger set them all cascading down the stairs. Supper was served in Bella’s shop at the rear, amidst the queer polished forms on which the “shoulderbraces” were made. A difference arose between Jasper and Charley, upon the latter’s expressing a desire to share the society of the aristocratic Hattie. For a moment a row threatened; but Wilfred had the happy idea of suggesting that they settle it by seeing which could first pitch an apple into a stove pipe hole near the ceiling. After sundry apples had been squashed against the wall, Jasper won.

Wilfred and Mildred, sitting a little apart from the others, ate largely, while they gazed at each other, no longer ashamed.

“Funny, how it makes you hungry,” said Wilfred, grinning.

“How what does?” asked Mildred, with an innocent air.

“Well . . . you know!”

Mildred giggled.

While Wilfred laughed with her, the sweetness of her struck through his body like a dagger. She exercised at once the charm of a child and of a woman. If she had been really grown-up, he would have been terrified of her, but she was a child at heart, and Wilfred was all right with children. At the same time, notwithstanding her dawn-freshness, she was a woman more experienced than himself. He did not have to remember to spare her.

Something set the crowd rampaging up the stairs again. Perhaps there were others who took advantage of the dark halls. Wilfred detained Mildred at the bottom.

“Let them go,” he whispered; “they’re so noisy. Let’s you and I go into my room where it’s quiet.”

“Oh, no!” said Mildred. “Not in there with you alone!”

“Oh,” said Wilfred, immediately cast down.

They hung unhappily at the bottom step.

“*Please* come,” he begged.

“I will if you promise to be good.”

“I’ll be as good as I can.”

They ran into Wilfred’s room. He closed the door, and slid the bolt.

“Oh, you mustn’t do that!” cried Mildred.

He told himself that her words didn’t signify anything. He believed that her lips were hungry for his. Wine had turned them crimson. So he merely looked at her, and walked away from the door. She avoided his look. They drifted to the worn bearskin in front of the fire, and sat down upon it, not touching each other. Now that they were alone together, behind the bolted door, constraint afflicted them again. They stared into the fire. Wilfred had a sense that precious moments were being wasted.

Finally Mildred said primly: “You have a nice room.”

“Like it?” said Wilfred. “It’s nice to have your own place.”

“I came in here once with Bella, when you were out,” she confessed.

“Did you?” he said delighted.

“I wanted to see if there were any pictures of girls about.”

“What did you care?”

“Oh, girls are always curious about a boy like you. You never give yourself away.”

Delicious flattery! “Well, there are no pictures.”

“Oh, I expect you’ve got them put away.”

“No. I don’t know any girls.”

“Well all I can say is, you’re pretty cheeky for a beginner!”

Wilfred felt bold and masterful again. “That is because you sweep me off my feet,” he said. He leaned towards her, bringing his face very close to hers. How enchanting it was to remain like that, without actually touching her. What a strange, strong current passed into him from her!

“You have put a spell on me!” he faltered.

“Promise me to stay quite still for a minute,” she whispered.

“What for?”

“Just because I ask you to.”

“Well . . . I promise.”

She caught his face between her two hands. “I want to kiss you all by myself,” she murmured. “In my way.”

Wilfred closed his eyes. “I’ll try to endure it,” he whispered.

“Lots of times. . . . Lots of times!” she crooned. “Ah, you’re so sweet! You’re as sweet as a baby!”

Wilfred received this with mixed feelings. “I don’t want to be kissed like a baby . . . !”

Between kisses she giggled. “Well, I’m not! . . . I just said you were as sweet as a baby. . . . I’d like to kiss you a hundred times without stopping!” Moving her head from side to side that her lips brushed his, she whispered: “I’m so glad you’re new at this . . . !”

“Time’s up!” cried Wilfred, flinging his arms around her. Deprived of any prop, they toppled over on the rug. “You weren’t good!” he murmured accusingly. “You began it! That lets me out! What do you think a man is made of? . . . Oh, you darling . . . !”

“Oh, Wilfred, don’t!” she begged in a panic. “Please, *please* darling Wilfred! You’re so much stronger than I! *Please* let me up! Let me out of this room . . . !”

Gathering her up in his arms, Wilfred carried her to the couch.

Clinging to him, she continued to protest. “Please, *please* Wilfred! Let me up . . . ! I demand that you open that door! . . . Oh, Wilfred, I’m so ashamed. I can’t bear to look at you . . . !”

“That’s easy fixed,” he said, laughing. He reached over their heads, and turned out the light.

In the small hours the three friends were making their way back across Washington Square arm in arm, Wilfred in the middle. Wilfred was too

much excited to seek his bed; he had offered to see his two friends home. Jasper's face wore a sleepy smile; but Stanny looked disgruntled. On this night he had had no luck.

Wilfred's turgid feelings almost strangled utterance. "By God! but you fellows are dear to me!" he cried, pressing their arms against his ribs. "What would I do without you? I suppose I'm drunk. When I froth up like this I know I make a fool of myself. I don't care. I've got to tell you how I feel. . . . I've been as miserable as hell lately. Well, that's over. I've made a stage. . . . You think and think and get nowhere. No fixed point! Like a squirrel in a revolving cage! Like a nebula in the ether!—That's damn good, you fellows. . . . Nebula in the ether! . . . For once I have forgotten myself! It's astonishing. By letting everything go I caught hold of something solid. There is such a thing as joy! Oh, Heaven, it makes up for everything! There is beauty. . . . Oh my God! but life is good! I wouldn't change with God to-night . . . !"

"Oh, for God's sake!" said Stanny. "One would think you were the first male!"

So comic was this explosion of disgust, that Jasper and Wilfred stood still and roared with laughter. Stanny punched them, laughing, too. A tension was relieved. They continued skylarking on their way.

## PART FOUR: LOVERS

## PART FOUR

### I

ON the way to Thursday dinner with the Aunts, Wilfred went around by Sixth avenue in order to have a look at the news-stand. Yes, the Century was out! Good old Century in its plain yellow dress, and neat lettering! Wilfred's heart set up a slightly accelerated beating. Before paying over his thirty-five cents, he took the precaution of consulting the table of contents. "Romance in Rivington Street. . . . Wilfred Pell." A sigh of satisfaction relieved his breast.

Oblivious to the uproar at Sixth avenue and Eighth street, he leaned against a shop window to get the light over his shoulder, reading the sentences that he already knew by heart, with a delighted grin pressing into his cheeks. How human and funny it was! how offhand and graceful! He had *got* it that time! At the same time an inner voice was saying dryly, in Hilgy's manner: Oh, it's not as good as all that! His delight was mixed with apprehension: Would he ever be able to get it again?

He gave his private ring at the Aunts' door-bell, that the maid might not be brought up-stairs from her work. Aunt May opened the door. Wilfred had shoved the magazine in his overcoat pocket. He would not blurt out his news. Besides, his Aunts would be sure to say the wrong thing. Aunt May held up her cheek to be kissed, without looking at him. It was one of the most amusing characteristics of his people, the way they took each other for granted.

The reason for Aunt May's abstraction was revealed. "I think a rat must have died under the floor. . . . Huh?" she said sniffing. "These old houses . . . !"

"How inconsiderate!" said Wilfred.

She was already on her way back to the drawing-room, and did not get it. Wilfred presently followed, carrying the magazine in his hand.

"I am just finishing a letter," said Aunt May at her desk.

Wilfred looked around the room with a warm feeling about his heart. How pleasant the sight of something that was unchanged. The Brussels carpet with its all-over design; the skimmed-milk wall-paper with its neo-Gothic ornaments traced in gilt; the square piano with yellowed keys and absurd muscle-bound legs; the carved walnut furniture. Could he not do



something in a story with that tranquillizing room, with the whole quaint little house which was of a piece with it—but no! He was still too close to it. At the thought of the room up-stairs which had been his, he shivered with old pains and ardors.

Wilfred commenced to read the delicious story all over again.

Having sealed her letter, Aunt May became aware of his smile. “What is amusing you?” she asked.

“Damn good story!” said Wilfred.

“Wilfred! This is not South Washington Square!”

“Oh, beg pardon, Aunt. They tell me that profanity is becoming fashionable.”

“Not in this house! . . . Who is the story by?”

Wilfred affected to turn back to the beginning. “Chap called Wilfred Pell.”

“Wilfred! Give me that magazine!”

Together they studied the illustration to Wilfred’s story.

“I don’t think much of that,” remarked Aunt May.

“Putrid!”

“Wilfred . . . !”

“One is prepared for it,” said Wilfred like a long-suffering author. “He’s made my young lad look like a race track tout. Twenty years out of date. Why can’t these fellows look about them when they go into the streets? . . . However, it’s a Dugan, you see. That lends importance to the story. They paid more for that one picture than they did for the story.”

“How unjust!”

The placid, rosy Aunt Fanny came into the room.

“Fanny!” cried her sister. “Wilfred’s story in the Century!”

Aunt Fanny seized the magazine, and while her eyes fastened upon it, she held up her cheek sideways to be kissed.

Said Aunt May with a thoughtful air: “Wilfred, how many of those could you . . . Huh? . . . About the same amount of writing as ten letters, I should say. And if you had nothing else to do. . . .”

“Oh, but I have not your facility, Aunt May.”

“Don’t try to be funny! . . . Say, two a month anyway. . . .”

“It’s not how many you can write, but how many you can sell, my dear.”

“Oh, but the cheaper magazines will all be after you . . . Huh? now that the Century. . . .”

“Well, I wouldn’t exactly say that. The cheaper magazines have a grand conceit of themselves, you see. They affect to look upon the Century as a back number.”

“All the best people read the Century!”

“Unfortunately there are so many more people of the other kind!”

Later, at the table, Aunt May said with a casual air—but her hazy grey eyes were intent upon her thought: “Wilfred, now that you are becoming known . . . Huh? . . . you ought to . . . *Do* sit up straight in your chair! . . . you ought to go about more . . . !”

“Why, I circulate like a dollar bill!” said Wilfred. “I am worn and greasy with handling.”

“I *wish* you wouldn’t be vulgar!”

“Seriously, I have dozens of friends now.”

“Oh, South Washington Square!”

“I’m known as far North as Fifty-Ninth street. The Fifty-Ninth street crowd of artists and writers are *most* respectable. They sell their work, too. I know Walter Sherman, and Louis Sala and Frances Mary Lore. Miss Lore is a special friend of mine.”

The two Aunts exchanged an anxious glance. “Lore?” said Aunt Fanny. “Who are her people . . . Huh? . . .”

“Let me see,” said Wilfred, “her father was a letter carrier in Memphis. Or else he was the garbage collector. I forget.”

“Wilfred!”

“Well, it doesn’t signify, does it? Frances Mary stands on her own bottom.”

“*Wilfred!*”

“Oh, Aunt! I didn’t mean what you mean!”

“Seriously, Wilfred,” said Aunt May, “you are twenty-six years old. . . .”

“We should hate to see you marry on South Washington Square,” put in Aunt Fanny.

Aunt May frowned at Aunt Fanny. This was too direct.

Wilfred grinned at them both. An outrageous retort trembled on his tongue, but he bit it back. After all, they were dear old dears. And he was his own man now. “Well, thank God! that’s not an issue,” he said. “I don’t want to marry and I couldn’t if I did!”

“You ought to know the people who *count*,” said Aunt May.

“So I do,” said Wilfred. “In my world.”

“But that’s a very small world, my dear. . . . Huh? . . . I mean the great world.”

“Society?” said Wilfred. “I can hardly see myself performing with that troupe of trained seals.”

“And why not, pray?” asked Aunt May, bristling. “That is where you belong, on both sides of the house. Your name alone. . . . Huh? . . . the sole representative of your branch. . . .”

“And you have become quite nice-looking,” added Aunt Fanny.

“Thanks, ladies, thanks,” said Wilfred bowing.

“Nor are we entirely forgotten,” said Aunt May with dignity, “notwithstanding the parvenues who crowd everywhere. . . .”

“And the girls of that world are so much prettier and more charming,” put in Aunt Fanny.

Aunt May frowned at her again. But it was the seeming injudicious remark of Aunt Fanny’s which arrested Wilfred’s attention, and sent his mind cavorting down the very avenue that they wished. It was true! The girls of *his* world, writers and artists, good fellows as they were—well, that was just the trouble with them, they were such good fellows! When women descended into the arena to compete with men, they lost something of their allure. What cynic had he heard say that? He himself, would never have dared say it out loud amongst his friends; but was it not true? And sometimes, confound them! they beat a man at his own trade! How could you make love to a girl whose stories were in greater demand by the editors than your own? . . . Why not be honest with yourself, and confess that you were enough of a Turk at heart to be attracted by the idea of exquisite girls especially trained and groomed to please men. Very reprehensible, of course, but as long as there were such girls going, why not have one?

Wilfred was recalled to his surroundings by hearing Aunt May say, casually:

“Every time we see Cousin Emily Gore she asks after you.”

So that was the milk in the cocoanut! “Kind of her,” said Wilfred.

“She has several times given you an opening to call; but you never would.”

“That was when I was working for her husband,” said Wilfred. “No sucking up to the boss’s wife for me, thanks.”

“Wilfred! What an expression!”

“But I’m on my own now; the case is altered.”

“And Cousin Emily says,” added Aunt Fanny, “that there’s such a shortage of dancing men in society, they’re at a premium!”

Aunt May looked annoyed. Fanny *would* say the word too much!

“Yes, so I’ve heard,” drawled Wilfred. “Low society is really more select.”

“Will you call on Cousin Emily Gore? . . . Huh?” asked Aunt May.

“Haven’t got a Prince Albert.”

“We are told it is no longer indispensable.”

“Oh, they’ll take us in anything now, eh?”

“*Do* be sensible, Wilfred! . . . Will you go?”

“Oh well, I suppose an author’s got to know all sides of life—even the lowest.”

The two ladies exchanged a look of mutual congratulation.

“Wednesday is her day,” said Aunt May. “And Wilfred, dear, do allow yourself to be . . . Huh? . . . As you know so well how to be. . . . This mocking air may be . . . But not in Cousin Emily’s world, my dear. . . .”

It was then, Wilfred saw, Aunt Fanny’s turn to feel that May was risking all they had gained by saying too much. Their faces were so transparent! “Cousin Emily takes a special interest in the *débutantes*,” Aunt Fanny hastily put in. “They say that this year’s *débutantes* are the loveliest in years!”

“Well I may be a Turk,” said Wilfred, “but I’m not as much of a Turk as that—no *débutantes*!”

“A Turk. . . . Huh? . . .” said Aunt May. “I’ll let her know you’re coming.”

## II

**W**ILFRED knew the Gore house from cellar to garret, from having been required once in the old days, to take an inventory of its contents. It was rather piquant to be there now as a guest in a swallow-tail coat. It was not one of the greatest houses in New York; but ’twould serve. His hat and coat were taken from him in a horrible entrance hall in the “Moorish” style, all the rage about 1890. He passed through the library (which contained no books) all done in red velvet, and entered the drawing-room behind. The drawing-room, with its great bay-window giving on the side street, was rather fine he considered; evidently a pretty good decorator had been let loose in here. But there was far too much stuff in it. The prevailing tone was an agreeable blue.

In the bay stood a grand piano, with a great golden harp placed beside it. Wilfred smiled at the harp. It had not been moved in seven years. "Why in Hell a harp?" he asked himself. Against the wall facing the bay stood an immense upholstered settee; and over the settee in the place of honor, hung the famous portrait of Mrs. Gore by Madrazo. A superb figure. The rich blue brocade of her corsage seemed to be glued to her body like wall-paper.

It was a dinner for about twenty people. Mrs. Gore affected the Knickerbocker set, whose present day representatives showed a sad falling off from the picturesqueness of their ancestors. The ladies affected a rich and dowdy style of dress, still featuring the abdomen; and the gentlemen also, who ran to bottle shoulders, and a small, neat melon under their waistbands, suggested the magazine illustrations of twenty years ago. Obviously gentlemen, who toiled not neither did they spin. In America, for some reason, they looked piteous. There were several more or less subdued young persons present. Wilfred was introduced to a few of the guests, and left to shift for himself. He was to take in a Mrs. Varick, an anæmic little woman who kept up a fire of virtuous platitudes. One could safely agree with everything she said, while one looked about.

A little late, when all the estimable guests were visibly becoming uneasy, a woman entered the room, who changed the whole complexion of the party. Like a wild bird lighting in the poultry yard, Wilfred thought. She was about his own age with miscellaneous American features, not in the least beautiful. But she had the divine carriage of Diana, and Diana's arrowy glance. Never had Wilfred beheld that proud, free glance in living woman. What a glorious spirit it betokened! So defiant and desirable it rendered him helpless. She was wearing a dress of tomato red, partly misted with smoke-colored net. Nothing of yesteryear about *her*! Though she and all her works must have been anathema to the drab ones, Wilfred observed that they were inclined to fawn upon her. Obviously, that girl could get away with anything, anywhere, Wilfred thought.

At the table he was terrified and delighted to discover that she was to be on the other side of him. She sat down, talking busily to her companion. Wilfred stole a glance at her place card. "Miss Elaine Sturges." It had the effect of striking a gong. Elaine Sturges! Wilfred had not been above reading of the doings of the butterflies he despised; the Sturgeses of North Washington Square; elect of the elect! For several seasons she had been chief amongst the unmarried girls. It appeared that no entertainment was complete without her. Merely from having her name so often printed, the lustre of fame was about her plainly-dressed brown head; and Wilfred's imagination was dazzled afresh. While he sagely nodded his head in

agreement with Mrs. Varick's ambling comment, he sought in his mind to have ready some arresting thing to say, when his chance came. But his mind was a blank.

He happened not to be looking in that direction when a contralto voice said near his ear: "I say, who are you? Your place card is covered up."

Wilfred jumped. "Wilfred Pell," he said, smiling.

"I thought I knew all the Pells."

"I'm only an offshoot. A scribbling Pell."

"Didn't think such a thing was possible!"

They laughed, knowing the Pell characteristics.

Wilfred thought: She has not read my stories. . . . But why should she? I must say something at once, or she'll turn back to the other man. . . .

When it came, it sounded feeble. "I hate to be asked my name. I dislike it so much!"

"What, Wilfred?" she asked carelessly. "Yes, it is rather in the Percy and Harold class."

"One's mouth takes such a foolish shape in saying it."

Her cool, strong glance sought his eyes appraisingly. There was a thought in her eyes that she did not utter; but he read it.

"You think Wilfred suits me?" he said smiling, and sore at heart.

"I wasn't thinking," she said coolly. ". . . You have nice eyes."

Nice eyes! At that moment it was like an insult. And so good-humored about it! He struggled with a crushing sense of inferiority.

"Well, at any rate, you are well-named," he said.

"Am I? I thought the original Elaine was a pale, die-away maiden who floated down the river with flowers in her hair, and her toes turned to the sky!—But maybe I'm thinking of somebody else. My literary associations are hazy."

"The Lady of Shalott?" suggested Wilfred. "I was thinking of the mere sound of the name. Elaine! So forthright!"

"So you think I'm a forthright sort of person?"

"Rather!"

"That requires consideration."

"How do you seem to yourself?" asked Wilfred.

"Oh, I don't know. . . . We are all over-civilized, over-complicated nowadays. . . ."

“You are neither civilized nor complicated,” said Wilfred boldly.

“Well upon my word!” she said, half-affronted.

“Diana,” murmured Wilfred. “You know that picture at the Metropolitan; a rotten picture, but a glorious woman!”

She continued to stare, really amused, as with a baby’s prattle. Wilfred, as if Mrs. Varick had spoken to him, turned away. I *did* make an impression then, he thought; better leave her with it!

They talked again at intervals during dinner; the usual sort of thing. Wilfred had no other daring inspiration. However, when the divinely brave eyes turned on him, he perceived a speculative look in them. At least I exist for her, he thought hopefully.

After dinner there was music in the drawing-room (but not on the harp) and all the guests had to stay put—or so Wilfred supposed. Not having been sufficiently ready-witted to maneuver himself into a position beside her, he watched her from down the room. He was sitting beside the door into the hall. There was a sleek fellow behind her, leaning forward with his lips close to her ear. He appeared to be able to amuse her. He was not in the least afraid of her, Wilfred observed with a pang.

Taking advantage of a little movement among the guests between numbers, the red girl with characteristic nonchalance came sauntering down the long room, attended by her companion. Wilfred’s skin began to burn and prickle. She was headed directly for him. He suffered acutely. He did not see how he was going to keep his head up if she passed so close. She had laid a dreadful spell on him.

She did not pass him by. She stopped, and he jumped up. Careless of who might hear, she said:

“Come and sit on the stairs with me.”

Wilfred followed her like a man in a dream.

“Thanks, Ted,” she said over her shoulder to the other man, and he remained within the room.

Wilfred tingled. Came to me in the face of the whole room! Sent the other man away! But he was deeply perturbed, too. It should have been me to go to her, and carry her off. . . . What will Mrs. Gore say to my walking out on her concert like this?

Elaine seemed to read his thoughts. “They won’t blame you,” she said smiling. “They know me! . . . Oh well, poor dears! I like to give them something to talk about. They lead such dull lives!”

In the hall, the stairs started off at right angles, and after pausing on a sort of Moorish balcony, turned and went up in the proper direction without further divagations. Above the balcony it was rather secluded, and not too light. Here they sat, Wilfred with a tumultuously beating heart. There was already a meek youth and maiden higher up. Elaine permitted Wilfred to light a cigarette for her. Wilfred was astounded at his situation. Smoking companionably on the stairs with Elaine Sturges! He had supposed that these girls were so circumspect. However, there was nothing equivocal in the clear glance.

“After a season or two, what an experience of stairs you must acquire!” said Wilfred.

“Eh?” she said, not getting it—or not choosing to get it.

“You ought to write a monograph on the subject,” he blundered on; “The stairs of New York.”

She smiled inattentively, and Wilfred felt like a perfect ass.

“I never meet any artists or writers,” she said, “except old and famous ones. It seems so odd for a young man to go in for it. And a Pell!”

She means that she thinks its unmanly, thought Wilfred with a wry smile. “Oh, it’s an easy job,” he said flippantly.

“You only say that because you think I’m not capable of understanding,” she said.

“Not at all!” said Wilfred quickly. “It’s because I can’t appear to take myself seriously, without feeling like a fool!”

“Oh!” she said, looking at him as if he had given her new food for reflection.

Wilfred felt like a specimen impaled on a pin.

“Tell me more about myself,” she said presently. “It’s refreshing!”

“I have so little to go on!” protested Wilfred.

“That didn’t seem to hamper you a while ago. Make it up as you go along.”

“You always do exactly what you please.”

She smiled inscrutably. “That isn’t very clever!”

Wilfred felt flattened out. “Well . . . you have entirely false notions about life,” he said, making a desperate fresh start.

“That’s better,” she said serenely. “In what way do you mean?”



IT was after the lawful hours of business. Casting a glance up and down to assure himself no policeman was watching, Wilfred descended three steps, and knocked on the shuttered door of the little Hungarian café in East Fourth street. He was admitted as a matter of course. A haze of tobacco smoke filled the interior. The cymbaline player had gone home; and the place seemed oddly quiet. There were only four or five figures crouching over the tables; habitués of the place.

Relief filled Wilfred's breast at the sight of Stanny in his usual place, over against the wall, his back to the door. Impossible to tell if he were drunk. It required more than a casual glance to discover that in Stanny. Opposite him sat Mitzi of course, with her seraphic, unchanging smile. The wide-eyed, soulless, pretty creature!—Not soulless, really; one must be fair; soulless only to them. Stanny, brooding upon her face, was giving everything away in his eyes. Andreas, the proprietor, passing to and fro with the drinks, scarcely troubled to hide his contempt. Wilfred became hot with angry compassion.

Big Andreas greeted him with loud heartiness, the while his black eyes glittered remotely. They hated each other. Mitzi turned her smile on Wilfred, offering him an adorable, plump, cruel little paw with short tapering fingers. That is to say, the kind of hand which is called cruel, he thought. In reality there was no cruelty in Mitzi; she was merely docile. Stanny looked around at him without any expression whatever; and by that, Wilfred knew he was drunk. He dropped into the seat beside Stanny, and a glass of *tchai* was put before him.

"'Ello, Vee'fred!" said the adorable Mitzi "'Ow you was to-night?"

Wilfred was fully sensible of her magical quality—the quality of a red rose beginning to unfold; but it left him unperturbed. For one thing she was too foreign. "Out o' sight!" he replied. "I don't need to ask how you are. You are prettier than ever to-night."

"You lie!" said Mitzi, pouting good-humoredly. "You no t'ink I pretty girl. You t'ink I ogly girl."

"Aw, shucks!" said Wilfred. "You know quite well you're the prettiest girl East of Third avenue!"

Mitzi, having exhausted her English, relapsed into her smile. Occasionally she made a droll face at either Stanny or Wilfred and murmured: "Aw, shucks!" Mitzi could sit and smile at a man—any man, the whole evening through without betraying either tedium or self-consciousness. There was that in her smile Wilfred thought, which called into being fires she was incapable of comprehending.

Wilfred was aware that anger was smoking within Stanny. Finally it puffed out spitefully: "What do you want here?"

"A glass of *tchai*," said Wilfred, smiling.

"By God! I'm sick of this Ten Nights in a Barroom stunt!" said Stanny passionately. "You're not my keeper!"

"Keep your shirt on," said Wilfred, smiling still for Mitzi's benefit. "I don't aim to be."

"Then what brought you here?"

"I wanted company," said Wilfred. It was true, but Stanny would not believe it.

"If I'm going to Hell, I prefer to go in my own way," said Stanny.

"Sure!" agreed Wilfred. "But I can't help thinking you're getting damned little out of this lap."

"That's all right!" said Stanny with drunken obstinacy.

"What you say him?" asked Mitzi, without in the least caring what the answer might be.

"I'm telling him I wish you were my sweetheart," said Wilfred grinning. (How sick he was of his own grin!) "That's what makes him sore."

"Aw, shucks!" said Mitzi.

"What do you expect to get out of it?" Wilfred went on to Stanny. "You know as well as I do, that the man only puts out his pretty little wife as a decoy. He never lets her out of his sight. I don't see how you can fall for it. With him looking on and sneering!"

"I wish to God I could see you make a fool of yourself over a woman!" cried Stanny bitterly. "You wouldn't be so damn superior then!"

Wilfred grinned until his nostrils hurt. He had spent the earlier part of the night walking up and down North Washington Square, gazing at the lighted windows of the Sturges sitting-room with sick eyes; picturing a man inside bolder than himself.

"But I never will! I never will!" said Stanny. "You're too much up in the air!"

"You don't know me," murmured Wilfred.

"Yah! a hell of a romantic feller if the truth were known, eh?" sneered Stanny.

Wilfred went on grinning inanely; tracing a capital E on the table with his forefinger. It created a sort of diversion to have Stanny abusing him unjustly; it was a counterirritant. He was absolutely sure of Stanny's

affection. It comforted him a little to lean his breast against the thorn of misunderstanding. It was the nearest to obtaining sympathy that he could hope for, he thought.

After awhile Wilfred said: "Will you come now?"

"No!" said Stanny.

But Mitzi, though she could not understand their talk, perceived that there was something inimical in the atmosphere. Presently she yawned behind the sinister little manicured paw, and stood up.

"Well, goo'-ni', boys. Come round to-morrow."

Through sullen lashes Stanny watched the little thing go swaying down the room and through the curtain at the rear, an unfathomable pain in his eyes. Wilfred raged internally. A man like Stanny to be brought down by *that*! What am I raging at? he asked himself. Certainly not at Stanny; nor at the unconscious, infantile Mitzi. And he had no God to rage at.—At the same time Wilfred envied Stanny; his pain was so much simpler than his own.

Wilfred and Stanny went out on the sidewalk. At the Third avenue corner Stanny stopped.

"You had better leave me here," he said bitterly, but without anger; "you can do me no good to-night."

"How about your doing me a little good?" suggested Wilfred.

"Don't make me laugh!" said Stanny. "You're as transparent as window glass! . . . If you could only get rid of your evangelical streak!"

"I don't want to save you," said Wilfred. "I just want to be with somebody. Even you! . . . My God! you're a selfish beggar!"

Stanny snorted, and started walking on with that extraordinarily doughty carriage of his, more pronounced when he was drunk.

Wilfred fell in beside him. "Oh hell," he said, "you can say what you like. I'm not going to leave you. . . . You can come to my place if you want. Or I'll go to yours if you'd rather."

"I can't sleep," muttered Stanny.

"No more can I. Let's walk then."

When they had gone a block, Stanny stopped short, and faced Wilfred. "I know I'm a bloody fool," he said ill-temperedly. "Now are you satisfied?"

Wilfred slipped his arm through Stanny's "I'm a bloodier fool than you, old fellow, and my heart's just as heavy!"

"Oh, for God's sake!" cried Stanny passionately. "You and your heart! Do you think I can't see that you're saying that just to make me feel better?"

Nothing can touch *you*! I wish to God you'd give over trying to manage me like a woman!"

Wilfred laughed.

When they got to the corner of Washington Square, Stanny kept straight on, and by that Wilfred knew that he was coming to his place. As they turned in at the old iron gate, rusting under its hundred coats of paint, in Stanny's sullen eyes could be read as plainly as if it had been spoken, his intention of inveigling Wilfred into going to bed, and afterwards slipping out again.

As soon as they got inside Wilfred's room, they started to quarrel viciously. Wilfred insisted on making up the fire, and Stanny said they shouldn't need it. Then about the bed. Stanny all but knocked Wilfred into his own bed. Wilfred however, insisted on lying down on the moth-eaten bearskin before the fire. Stanny looked as if he would have liked to kick him there.

"You might as well take the bed," said Wilfred.

"I'm damned if I will!" cried Stanny passionately.

"If I was alone, I should be lying here just the same. I can't sleep, and I like to look at the fire."

"Seeing pictures, eh?" sneered Stanny.

"Sure, seeing pictures. . . . What fools we are to scrap with each other, Stanny. . . ."

"Sure, what fools!" agreed Stanny, suddenly falling quiet and mournful. —But instantly, he lost his temper again. "You needn't think I'm going to take your bed and leave you lying on the floor!"

"Well, you know what you can do with it," snarled Wilfred.

Stanny flung himself into Wilfred's big chair, and the bed remained without an occupant.

The firelight filled the room. The rows of books looked gravely down from the tall shelves. Bye and bye Wilfred had the satisfaction of seeing the bitter, down-drawn face in the chair begin to relax. Stanny took a more comfortable position, and his head dropped over against one of the wings. But he was not yet asleep. From the borderland he murmured:

"She has enslaved my senses. . . . I am besotted . . . !"

Wilfred murmured involuntarily: "You don't know it, but you are lucky it is only your senses. If it was your imagination that was enslaved, there would be no satisfaction possible; no escape; ever!"

There was no reply, and Wilfred looked over apprehensively. To his relief he perceived that Stanny had not heard it; he was asleep.

Wilfred stretched himself out on the old rug, yielding to the luxury of pain. Real pain that bit like teeth. For an instant he beheld the truth with devastating clearness. There was no hope for him. Elaine's instinct was sounder than his own. He and she could not possibly find happiness together. He was a better man than she would ever guess: but his worthier qualities were sealed to her, and must always be so. Impossible to reach an understanding. In another way, he was not man enough to be her mate. How that thought stabbed! But it was the truth. It must be faced out. Thank God! pain could be borne. He had his own kind of strength, not at all a showy kind, and Elaine would never perceive it; but he need not despise himself. Pain fortified him. He looked over towards Stanny with a feeling of gratitude. In some queer way it was due to the presence of that solid body in his chair, that he had been vouchsafed this moment of lucid pain, instead of being dragged as usual, helpless at the heels of the wild horses of Imagination.

#### IV

**I**N the winter twilight Elaine and Wilfred were sunk in easy chairs side by side before the fire in the Sturges sitting-room, the smoke of their cigarettes mounting lazily. In that serene atmosphere Wilfred was least serene. Whenever he sat there his heart beat too fast; and the clamorous thoughts jostled confusedly in his brain. The smiling servants had softly brought the tea things, and later, had carried them away. A lovely, gracious life! Should he ever be able to take it as if it were his by right? The Sturges house was almost exactly opposite Bella Billings; distant about three hundred yards; but social deeps rolled between.

Elaine was sliding down in the deep chair on the small of her back, her long legs inelegantly thrust out, her feet crossed. Elaine could yield to any common impulse without losing the quality of distinction, he thought. The firelight was strong in her resolute face. It was not beautiful in the ordinary sense. He despised the insipidity of pretty women. There was something much greater here; character; passion; and that divine assurance of herself. Whence arose Elaine's magnificent air? It was because she held herself one of the elect of earth. Ordinary people were so far beneath her, she could afford to exhibit them every kindness. All wrong! thought Wilfred. A preposterous assumption! Yet there it was! And it beat him down!

They were good enough friends to be silent together when they felt like silence. But those silences! At a certain point Wilfred's heart would begin to rise slowly into his throat. There she sat a yard away, and so remote! He ached for her intolerably. Was this love? More like an insanity. Suppose she were to cast herself suddenly into his arms, would he know what to do with her? Would he not turn clammy? Did he ever know what he wanted? An insanity! Being denied her, he ached and burned. Burned, while he sat still and answered her cool remarks, coolly. Why was he forced to go on thinking and thinking about her in her presence? Making figments of her while the reality was at his side!

Elaine herself never thought, though she liked to suppose that she did: all her acts, words were struck out of her, instant and bright as fire. How natural for her to despise one like him! She *did* despise him sub-consciously, though they were good friends; her speculative glance often confessed it. That high air of hers was a continual challenge to his masculinity, and he dared not take it up. Wilfred believed that she was just a little higher with him than with others. It suggested that she believed he was a coward in the presence of women. In other quarters he had not been considered so. What good was that to him here? By thinking him a coward she made him a coward in *her* presence.

Yet she had singled him out, him, the insignificant scribbler, amongst a crowd of glittering young men who dangled after her. These hours that Wilfred spent alone with her had been specially contrived by her. Nothing happened by accident in Elaine's busy life. In dealing with men, she enveloped herself in an atmosphere of high mystery. During Wilfred's hour she never volunteered the least information as to how she had spent the other twenty-three. It tormented him unbearably. He knew that other men came to the house on other days. He had seen some of them springing eagerly up the steps. Well, and why not? He had nothing to reproach her with. She was always clear-eyed and candid. But she ordained how much of herself each was to have. An hour to Wilfred twice a week perhaps, leaving him to spend the others in torment. He suffered when he was with her; he suffered when he was away. His only moment of happiness came when *he* went springing up the steps. Things had come to such a pass with him, he could no longer do his work.

Why had she singled him out for even these infrequent hours? That he might talk to her. There was no secret about it. "Nobody talks to me like you," she had said once, while her eyes flickered with unconscious contempt for the young man who was a talker. And Wilfred accepted it, hating

himself. They sat in front of the fire talking like disembodied intelligences while Wilfred eyed her.

After such a silence, Elaine said: “The trouble with me is, I don’t know anything.”

“Hear! Hear!” said Wilfred.

“Oh, you needn’t get funny,” she retorted. “It’s something to know that you don’t know anything. . . . I mean. . . . What do I mean? I mean I don’t know anything in my head. I know lots of things by intuition. I think I know more than you do, that way. . . .”

“Not a doubt of it,” said Wilfred.

“But the voice of intuition is dumb,” Elaine went on. “I act as I act without knowing why. There is no residue. Intuition prompts you how to act at the moment; but it doesn’t help you to lay out a course.”

How exactly, sometimes, unconscious people can convey what is in their minds! thought Wilfred enviously. “What about books?” he suggested.

“Books! Pshaw! Books are a kind of dope!” said Elaine.

“You read only novels—and those, not the best.”

“I *do* read the best!” she said indignantly.

“I don’t mean the latest best,” said Wilfred.

“I read poetry, too. . . . But poetry just lifts you up—and lets you drop again. Oh, I suppose it’s my fault. Really serious books bore me.”

“There are good novels,” said Wilfred.

“They get on so slowly!” said Elaine with a sigh. “And when you do disentangle the meaning, it’s only what you know already.”

“What is it, exactly, that you are after?” asked Wilfred.

“Knowledge of life,” she said promptly. “Old people pretend that they have all the knowledge. I *feel* that they are wrong.”

“In what, for instance?”

“Well, it’s a platitude amongst old people that love always dies.”

“I don’t know of any book that would assure you that it doesn’t,” said Wilfred, lowering his eyes.

“Never mind books. What do you think? Does love die?”

“What kind of love?” he asked with a sinking heart.

“What kind?” she repeated staring. “I mean love between a man and a woman, of course.”

“Passion burns itself out,” said Wilfred, “but I suppose something fine may come of it.”

“Oh, that’s just like an old person,” said Elaine. “The cooling-off process is hideous to me! I don’t want any left-overs!”

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” he asked.

“It doesn’t help to be cynical!”

“What does your own heart tell you?”

“My heart tells me that love dies,” murmured Elaine unexpectedly. She was staring into the fire. “I was hoping for some reassurance.”

“I hope it does,” said Wilfred flippantly. He observed that his teeth were clenched together.

She ignored this. “Even though love is transitory, should we not stake everything on it, anyway?” she murmured.

“Everybody must decide that for themselves,” he said composedly, feeling like a little waxy-faced oracle.

“But what do *you* think?” she insisted.

“It’s too complicated!” he said with a burst of irritation. “I could not possibly give an answer to cover the whole question.”

Another silence.

“Do you believe in the devil?” asked Elaine.

“In my own individual devil, yes.”

“What’s he like?”

“He’s a wet blanket!”

Elaine laughed. “How original! Mine is a more conventional sort of devil.”

“Yes, I know.”

“How do you know?” she asked quickly.

“Can’t I have intuitions too?”

“Well, you’re entirely wrong about *me*,” she said vivaciously. “You have been from the first. You have a ridiculous notion that I am a sort of cavewoman. Why, if I were, would I be talking to you like this now?”

Wilfred smiled into the fire.

“Oh well, if it amuses you . . . !” said Elaine, shrugging.

“You know that big statue of Barnard’s,” she presently went on; “I Feel Two Natures Struggling Within Me”?

“All rot!” he said rousing himself. “I imagine that is just a little joke of Barnard’s on the dear public. What he is really portraying is the Triumph of Youth Over Age! It was a favorite subject during the renaissance. . . . Two



natures! Life is not so simple! That is merely a theological distinction. Body and soul are *not* at war with each other. We can't get anywhere without Body. In the complete life you would find Body and Soul pulling in double harness."

"But is there ever a complete life?" asked Elaine.

"Well . . . no! I suppose not!" murmured Wilfred, falling through space. "It is only an ideal. . . ."

Their eyes were suddenly drawn together. They exchanged a startled, questioning glance like prisoners beholding each other from separate towers. Forever solitary and wistful. They knew each other then. They hastily looked away, laughing in an embarrassed way; each terrified lest the other might speak of what he had surprised. But neither spoke, and they secretly softened towards each other.

After awhile Elaine got up, and switched on the lamps. She glanced at the clock. "There's a man coming directly," she said.

Wilfred stood up.

"Don't be silly!" said Elaine. "Suppose I *was* giving you a hint to go, why be in such haste to take it? It's not very flattering."

"I've had my hour," he said, trying to speak lightly.

"You said that just like an actor! Oh, I wish I could teach you how to deal with women!"

"Well, if it comes to that, why is it always up to the man?" demanded Wilfred.

Elaine opened her eyes. "Well, women have to be won, don't they?"

He spread out his hands. All wrong! All wrong! But he could not dispute her. She had stolen his strength.

"Sit down again," she said. "You ought to know by this time that I never deal in hints. What I have not yet had a chance to say is, I want you to meet this man. An unusual specimen!"

Wilfred discovered that he still had reserves of pain. Was *that* the rôle he was to be called upon to play?

Far-off in the great house Wilfred heard the buzz of the door-bell. After an interval the front door opened and closed again with its opulent thud. He entered quickly, thought Wilfred. There were rapid footsteps on the stairs. Coming up two steps at a time. Wilfred's heart beat suffocatingly. That treacherous heart of his!

"It's Joe Kaplan," said Elaine, shielding her face from the fire.

“Oh, Joe Kaplan,” said Wilfred with an air of interest. His belly suddenly failed him. Rising, he caught sight of the grinning, white-faced manikin in the mirror over the fireplace, and quickly lowered his eyes in disgust.

“You have heard of him?” asked Elaine.

“Who hasn’t?” said Wilfred.

Joe swept in. “Hello, Elaine!”

She had risen, and was helping herself to a fresh cigarette from the mantelpiece. “Hello, Joe,” she said, without looking around.

Having caught sight of Wilfred, Joe stopped short in his eager progress.

“This is Mr. Pell,” drawled Elaine. “. . . Mr. Kaplan.”

Joe jerked into motion again. “I know him,” he said. “Hello, Pell! What the devil are you doing here?”

It was said with a good-humored grin, though Joe’s eyes were snapping. To Wilfred’s relief, he did not put out his hand. Perceiving enmity, Wilfred had not sufficient self-command to match the feigned good humor. Inside him there was howling, black confusion. Yet the necessity of good form was strong upon him, too. All he could do was to stand grinning in a sickly way. How craven he must appear, knuckling under to Joe at the first word!

Joe wasted no time on him. Elaine had reseated herself, and he plumped into the chair that Wilfred had lately occupied. “I say, Elaine,” he said; “I saw that blue chow to-day. He’s a sweet-tempered little beast; but my man says if you want to show him, he’s not good enough. So I thought we had better wait until something first-class turned up.”

“But I liked him,” said Elaine. “And he liked me!”

“Oh, in that case, Princess, he shall be here to-morrow!”

So Joe has become a sporting gentleman, thought Wilfred with curling lip. Wilfred was left standing like a clown with a witless grin daubed on his face. What he ought to have done was to leave, he knew; but he was incapable of making a good exit; and he would not slink out like a whipped dog. So he stayed. He sat down on a straight-backed chair a little to one side of the fireplace, facing the other two. The faces of Elaine and Joe were strongly revealed in the firelight. It was nothing to them if Wilfred watched them.

They rattled on. It appeared that they shared a hundred small interests. Joe had achieved the precise tone of Elaine’s world. The rattle was all a blind, Wilfred suspected. The fact that they never looked at each other, gave the game away. He imagined that he heard a rich quality in their laughter,

having nothing to do with the trifles they discussed. Hidden things escaped in their laughter. Elaine's superb nonchalance might very well be a sham. She could get away with anything. Such a woman recognized only one truth; the truth of her emotions. Color had stolen into her cheeks; it was an effort to keep her lips decorous. Secrets! secrets! between these two! Diana was only a woman of the flesh! What a handsome male Joe was, damn him! Wilfred felt as if he would die with the beating of his heart, and the pressure of blood against his temples.

Knowing himself, he strove desperately to make a stand against this madness. You are imagining it all! You cannot honestly say that Elaine has changed in the slightest degree. She treats Joe precisely the same as she treated you. . . .

Elaine sought to draw Wilfred into the talk. "Funny you two should be acquainted," she said.

"Oh yes," said Joe with a mocking laugh in Wilfred's direction. "It's ten years since we first laid eyes on each other. Remember that night, Pell?"

"I remember," said Wilfred, seeking Joe's eyes in wonder. Joe's eyes skated laughingly away. Clever and daring as Satan! thought Wilfred.

Joe went on to give a humorous account of the psychical evening at the house of Wilfred's Aunts long ago. Elaine was to infer that this was the occasion of their first meeting. In telling the story, Joe allowed his own soullessness to appear quite nakedly. He didn't care; nor, apparently, did Elaine. It was a good joke.

Meanwhile Wilfred was working himself up to the point of going. He finally stood up with a jerk. "Well, I must trot along," he said in a thin voice.

"So long, Wilfred," said Elaine in her boyish way.

"Ta-ta, old man," said Joe ironically.

You be damned! thought Wilfred, looking straight ahead of him.

He went out stiffly. Silence in the room behind him. Already! Already! What if he should go back? . . . Why go back? He knew without going back. And it wouldn't shame *them!* . . . Elaine . . . and that soulless blackguard! All her brave colors hauled down! Abandoning herself . . . his practised embraces! Oh, Christ! . . .

He hurried out of the house with a shrieking in his ears.

**A**FTER having resisted the temptation for many days, Wilfred pushed a button at the door of one of the little flats in the Manhasset Building on Fifty-Ninth street. He was ashamed to drag his dead and alive self there for succor; nevertheless a feeling of thankfulness sprang up in his breast like water in dusty earth. What a blessing it was to have a place where you could drop in without an appointment, and be sure of your welcome. Perhaps he could conceal from Frances Mary how far gone he was.

She opened the door. His eyes were gratified by the sight of her bland and dusky fairness; her calm. Frances Mary was always the same. "Hello!" she said with her ironical smile, while her eyes beamed with friendliness. She had a quality of voice that worked magic with refractory nerves. "Come in!"

She walked away from the door, leaving Wilfred to close it and follow. If she had read anything in his face she gave no sign of it.

"Hope I'm not interrupting your work," he said, trying not to sound perfunctory. He knew he was interrupting.

"I was ripe for an interruption."

At the end of a tiny hall was her general room, a mellow retreat highly characteristic of its owner. It had two windows looking northward over the flat roofs of dwellings below. The effect was of green and brown and gold. Wilfred looked around him thirstily; it provided just what he needed then.

"This room is as right as a natural thing," he said grinning. "Nothing sticks out. It doesn't ask to be admired, but to be flopped in. Demoralizing I call it. Makes me feel tearful."

Frances Mary looked most ironical when she was flattered. "Want a hanky?" she asked.

There was a hard coal fire burning in the grate. She put a plump brass kettle on the trivet and swung it in.

"Don't bother about tea," said Wilfred; "at least not for me."

"I want it," she said. They always carried through this little fiction.

She moved about the room, bringing out the tea things. She had the gift of getting things done without any fuss. A tall woman, of an essentially feminine tenderness of flesh, her glance was not tender but level. The leaf-colored room was a fit setting for her. Wilfred's frantic feeling passed away. How restful! How blessedly restful! Her unexpressed sympathy was like sleep stealing on.

He could always count on her sympathy, he reflected, though she rarely agreed with him. There was a wholesome astringent quality in her nature.

She was not generally popular he had observed with surprise. People complained that she seemed to mock at everything. They would not see that her mockery was only a thin shield for her heavenly kindness of heart. He felt that he alone understood Frances Mary. She had a slightly invidious smile; and her gentle glance was generally veiled. In particular, stupid women hated her for her smile. Yet she was what is known as a woman's woman; she had devoted friends amongst the best sort of women. On the other hand she seemed to know but few men, and they not the best sort of men; women's men.

Frances Mary was predestined to die single, Wilfred supposed, watching her. And she so splendidly made; what a pity! Loved babies, too. But she lacked any disturbing quality for men. Well, she was one of the rare women who could do without a man. There would be no souring here. Not with that serene mind. The happiest person he knew. Noble. If one had only had the luck to fall in love with a woman like that instead of . . . well, it would be just the difference between life and death! But you couldn't fall in love with Frances Mary. She was too intelligent. A hollow laugh sounded inside Wilfred. What would be said of a man who uttered such a sentiment in a story?—But it was true just the same. Nature disregarded intelligence in the business of mating. Perhaps intelligence was too modern for Nature. It was a truism that a man's man and a woman's woman were the best types of each sex. What a ghastly joke anyhow, the whole damned business of sex! The peach-like Frances Mary doomed to shrivel, ungathered; and he to his Hell of base jealousy!

She did not look at him while she moved about, nevertheless Wilfred felt that he was being explored with a faculty other than sight—that withdrawn glance of hers; that hint of a smile. In haste he said, still in the tone of one determined not to be perfunctory—he could hear it!

“How is your work going?”

At the tone, her smile deepened; but she answered simply: “I've been working at the ‘Æolian Harp.’ I'd like you to read part of it later.”

“I expect I shan't like it,” he said. “A little bird tells me you have been niggling at it. I warned you to leave it alone. It was all right as it was.”

An adorable look of anxiety came into Frances Mary's face. It gave Wilfred a pleasant sense of power. She came to a stop; looking at him; biting her lip. “I . . . I thought I had improved it,” she faltered.

“Your vice is, never knowing when to leave a thing alone,” he said severely. “You lose sight of the whole in the parts.”

“I expect I do,” she said with a disarming humility. “Your criticism is awfully good for me. . . . What are you doing?”

Wilfred relapsed into the depths. “Nothing,” he said. The blackness was real enough; but he equivocated respecting its cause. For days past he had not even tried to write. “I’m still stuck in the middle of my restaurant story.”

“What’s the matter with it?”

“Too damn sentimental!”

Frances Mary was silent.

Wilfred found he was not so deadened, but that he could still feel the pin-pricks of wounded self-love. “You don’t say anything,” he said bitterly. “You think it’s tripe, too.”

“Oh, not as bad as that!” she said. “The sentimentality was implicit in the original design. . . .”

“Why didn’t you tell me so then?”

“I tried to, but you wouldn’t have it so. . . . Why not finish it now, frankly in a sentimental vein; and go on to something else.”

“Why not advise me to tear it up?”

“But it has charm. It will sell readily.”

“You think that’s all I’m good for!”

She shook her head. “You can be as brutal as you like, next time. Your Rivington street story wasn’t sentimental.”

“Ah! don’t throw that up to me! I’ve never been able to equal it!”

“Every artist knows that feeling!”

“You manage to maintain the level of your stuff. It makes me sore, you write so much better than I do!”

Frances Mary smiled somewhat dryly. “I’ve been at it longer than you.”

“That hasn’t got anything to do with it. You have an instinct for perfection, while I’m all over the place!”

“Perfect stories of perfect ladies to adorn the chaste pages of our leading family magazine!” she said, smiling still.

“It doesn’t matter what they’re about, they’re well done!” said Wilfred.

“I suppose I do write better than you do now,” she said, ceasing to smile. “But my work is much the same as it was ten years ago when I began. There is more hope in your unevenness than in my dead level.”

“I truckle to the editors,” said Wilfred glooming.

“So you do,” admitted Frances Mary—and laughed when he looked up resentfully. “But as long as you know it, the case is not hopeless.”

“I’m no good!” said Wilfred, touching bottom.

“Have it your own way,” she said. “You are in one of your self-accusatory moods to-day, and to argue with you only strengthens your obstinacy. I’ll wait until you come out of it.”

“It’s not only to-day!” Wilfred burst out. “I shall never write again! I’ve utterly lost the knack. I can’t put together an intelligible sentence! I have gone dead inside!”

Frances Mary looked at him levelly before answering. Wilfred knew that look. It was to enable her to decide if this was the mere froth that he sometimes gave off, or if there was really something in it. He couldn’t tell which she decided. She said:

“Why not drop work for a while? Take a day or two off to walk in the country. There is snow on the Connecticut roads.”

He shook his head. “Can’t leave town just now,” he said, looking down.

She made no comment. The tea was made. Extending a cup she said: “Try hot tea.”

Wilfred forgot his guard for a moment. Raising his eyes to hers, he broke out laughing. “What a fool you must think me!” he said.

For an instant, the veil was lifted from her glance too. By his laughter she knew that he was in real pain. She laughed too. “Perfect!” she said.

Her laughter; her warm glance made Wilfred feel that existence was a little less like a vacuum.

He allowed himself to be persuaded to stay for dinner. Dinner in Frances Mary’s flat had the effect of a miracle. Without any heat or fuss or noise, a little table appeared in the center of the room, and was dressed in snow and silver. She wafted in and out of the room, keeping up the conversation from the kitchenette. An enticing odor gradually got itself recognized, and in a surprisingly short space of time, behold! there was the dinner on the table, an exactly right meal, never quite the same as anybody else’s dinner. Like her room, and like her stories, it revealed the Frances Mary touch. There was even a little bottle of wine to grace the board. At the last moment she had made an opportunity to go change her dress. Wilfred, who knew something about housekeeping, always marvelled how it was done.

He suddenly discovered a renewed zest for food. “Oh, this is good!” he said continually; and Frances Mary trying in vain to look ironical, smiled all over like a little girl. A tinge of color had come into her magnolia-petal cheeks and her eyes were bright. Feeding herself abstractedly, she eagerly

watched every mouthful he took, and filled his glass before it was half emptied. They talked shop, and Wilfred experienced a precarious happiness. Outside of that enchanted haven the beast might be waiting to rend him—let it wait!

When the table was cleared they gave themselves up to talk. Frances Mary had an insatiable curiosity concerning Wilfred's friends, whom she had never seen, and his daily doings. He enjoyed feeding it of course; but was sometimes troubled by the feeling that he was inflicting himself unduly on his friend. When he remembered to try to draw her out, she was generally too many for him.

“What have you been doing lately, Frances Mary?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me about your friends.”

“I can't make them sound as interesting as you do yours.”

“What do you do with yourself? You can't write all the time.”

“I ruminate,” said Frances Mary flippantly.

Wilfred laughed. “I can see you!” he said unguardedly. “I know you so well!”

She looked at him quickly, started to speak, and thinking better of it, pulled down the corners of her mouth mockingly.

“Oh, sure, that was a fatuous thing to say,” muttered Wilfred, blushing.

“It's what everybody says to everybody,” she said.

“But I ought to have known better. Nobody knows anybody, really.”

“I don't know,” said Frances Mary, “when two people live together they may. Because then they have a chance to watch each other in the company of others. But you and I travel in entirely separate orbits. The only point of intersection is your coming here to see me. And you don't come very often. And if you find anybody else here you clear out immediately.”

“But surely we get more out of it. . . .”

“Surely! The point I was making is that all you see is your own facet of me.”

“Do you mean you show a different facet to everybody?”

“Oh, nothing so exciting. Alas! I am not different from other girls. I am always the same—at least I think I am. What I mean is, that you only see in me what you wish to see, and there is never anybody else around to upset your self-pleasing notions.”

“Oh, come!” said Wilfred.



“It’s just as well,” said Frances Mary with her mocking smile—she was mocking herself now. “Who wants the truth to be known about oneself? Especially a woman. Mystery is her existence. No matter how clever she is, she cannot escape the common fate of woman. Her own concerns are so unreal to her! . . . Mercy, what nonsense I am talking!”

A note of real bitterness had crept into Frances Mary’s voice, and Wilfred felt that he was on the brink of a disclosure. But while he was still trying to puzzle out her meaning in his mind, he discovered that he had been hurried on to something else. It was a trick of hers. She was now asking him about his experiences in society.

“Oh, I couldn’t keep that up,” said Wilfred with his glib, surface mind. “It was useful to see a few interiors, and get a line on the way those people talk; but it’s deadly, really. You can’t let yourself go. It was cruel hard on a child of nature like me! And Mrs. Gore’s dinners weren’t as good as yours. Not by a damn sight.”

“I thought perhaps you might make a friend or two.”

“Hardly, in that milieu.”

“That brilliant girl you told me about; Elaine Sturges; she sounded promising.”

This name had the effect of a cave-in under Wilfred’s feet. He dropped sickeningly; the waters of wretchedness closed over his head. Just when he had succeeded in forgetting it, too. He carefully made his face a blank. The skin of it grew tight in the effort. “Oh, yes, she has character,” he said carelessly.

“Don’t you see her any more?”

“She leads a crowded life,” said Wilfred. “Occasionally she vouchsafes me an hour.”

“How picturesque, such a life!” murmured Frances Mary. “Has she got the imagination to conceive its picturesqueness?”

Wilfred attended closely to his pipe. His heart swelled and seemed to squeeze his lungs. He cautiously drew a long breath. He wondered if Frances Mary was doing this on purpose, but dared not look at her, for he suspected that she was looking at him. Her eyes were sharp.

“Hardly imaginative,” he said, after a pause, as if for consideration.

“If she isn’t imaginative, what on earth do you find to talk about?” asked Frances Mary.

Wilfred thought of venturing a laugh; decided against it. He shot a glance at Frances Mary through his lashes. She was no longer looking at

him. The line of her averted face suggested the same agonized self-consciousness that he felt. Of course, he thought, I am giving everything away, and she feels for me. She has guessed everything. Why not be open with her? He trembled with a horrible internal weakness. No! he thought desperately. If I let a single word out, I should go completely to pieces. Make a disgusting exhibition of myself; this thing's got to be clamped down. . . .

"Oh, she likes me to explain her to herself," he said lightly.

Frances Mary let the subject drop.

## VI

"THIS only drives me crazy!" said Joe, suddenly rising. ". . . It maddens me!"

Elaine huddled in the big chair, turned sideways and dropped her face on her outstretched arm. "You're not so crazy but you're able to stop!" she murmured resentfully.

Joe helped himself to a cigarette from the mantel. "The servants already suspect," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"They tap on the door before coming in."

"Well, let them suspect! They're devoted to me. Servants always are."

"That may be; but it won't prevent their talking. And talk spreads from servants."

"I don't care!"

"I *do*. If you won't take care of yourself, I must take care of you."

Elaine smiled crookedly.

"Oh, I'm not taking a moral attitude," said Joe. "It's just that I don't choose to have my wife talked about by servants."

"I have not said that I would marry you," she said quickly.

"But you will!"

Elaine was silent, looking into the grate. She was pale; her cheeks showed little shadowy hollows. It was a disagreeable mild day out-of-doors; indoors the fire sulked.

Her silence shook Joe a little. Darting an uneasy glance at her, he asked combatively: "Why don't you want to marry me?"

Elaine closed her eyes and let her head fall back. Joe's eyes fastened on the pulse in her wan throat. "Ah, don't let's begin that again," she said in a lifeless voice. "It gets us nowhere. . . . I love you! Isn't that enough?"

A spark returned to Joe's eyes; his lips pushed out a little. "But where is it going to land us?" he said. "We've got to thresh the thing out."

Elaine opened her eyes. "Oh for heaven's sake give me a cigarette and let's stop arguing about ourselves."

He put the cigarette between her lips and lighted it. "Why don't you want to marry me?" he persisted.

"If I marry, commonsense tells me it ought to be a man of my own sort. . . ."

"This is new!" put in Joe. "Where did you get it?"

". . . This madness will pass. What would we have then?"

"You mean one of the slick young fellows I meet around here? How often have you told me that their smoothness made you sick? You said it was my commonness and coarseness and naturalness that attracted you in the beginning."

"Sure, I said it; what good to remind me of it now."

"I'm only trying to get at your meaning."

"Well . . . marriage is an everyday affair—a matter of superficialities if you like; breakfast, lunch and dinner. We have to live by little things when this passes. . . ."

"What makes you think this feeling we have for each other will pass?" demanded Joe. "That is not like you."

"Well . . . everybody says it will pass . . ."

"Who is everybody . . . Wilfred Pell?"

Elaine straightened up in anger. She tossed the cigarette into the fire. "Don't be common and tiresome!" she said. "Do you think I would allow Wilfred Pell to discuss my private affairs with me?—or any other man? . . . What on earth made you think of him?"

"I dunno," said Joe indifferently. "I just had a hunch. . . . Just the same, it *was* Wilfred Pell."

"Oh, very well!" said Elaine hotly. "Then I am a liar!"

There was a silence. Joe whistled softly between his teeth.

"Not that I give a damn," he presently said, good-humoredly. "A man like Wilfred Pell couldn't trouble my peace any. I know the white-faced, hungry-eyed breed. You will always find them in a woman's room

whispering with her. That's as near as they get, poor devils! sympathetic and safe!"

"Wilfred Pell is a gentleman!" said Elaine. "He is intelligent and good-hearted and decent!"

"Sure!" cried Joe, grinning with an open brow. "He is all that; and I am none of it!—But what does it all signify really, between man and woman?"

Elaine was silent, still angry.

"This is just spinning words," said Joe, his voice becoming warm. "Why fight against the inevitable, sweetheart? I am your man! You can't resist me!"

"And you?" she asked.

"You are my woman!" he said with glittering eyes. "Look at me!"

She dragged her eyes up to him, where he stood by the mantelpiece, a tall, muscular figure, displaying himself. He was as finished in appearance as any young man she knew; and he had in addition, the zest which had always tormented her in the faces of vulgar young men. Her eyes grew irresponsible; her face seemed to sharpen.

"Do you doubt it?" he demanded.

She shook her head helplessly.

"Well, then?"

"I can't argue with you," she said, low.

"You're the sort of woman that never loves but once," said Joe. "If you were to let me go . . . !"

"Are you threatening to leave me?" she asked, with a bitter smile.

"Frankly, I can't stand this," said Joe. "I must either have you entirely, or I *will* leave you."

Elaine was silent. Her eyes were hidden. Suddenly she rose, and going to one of the windows, stood, twisting the cord of the window shade between thumb and finger, and looking down on the squalid panorama of soiled, half-melted snow. The old Square looked exhausted and leprous with the patches of scant dead grass and naked earth showing amidst the snow. Finally she murmured:

"I am not sure that you love me!"

"What more do you want?" cried Joe. "You know your power over me. You have felt my heart beat against yours. You know that when I come near you, I am lost."

"A power over your body," she murmured without looking around.

“That’s the only thing I know,” said Joe coolly. “I don’t go in for soul states. You’ve read too many novels. For God’s sake let’s be natural with each other. What else is there but this blind hunger we have for each other. The big thing that comes only once!”

“And passes!”

“Passes? Why do you keep harping on that? Do you doubt your own power? A woman like you! Are you afraid of common women? You will never lose me as long as you are sure of yourself!”

“Then I have lost you already!” she whispered to the glass.

“What’s that?” he asked irritably.

She would not repeat it. “I shouldn’t so much mind about you,” she said slowly, “if I was sure that *I* could stay mad. That’s what I most dread, coming to myself!”

“You needn’t fear,” said Joe smiling. “I’ll undertake to hold you.”

Elaine continued to look out of the window.

Presently he said: “I suspect the real reason is, you think I’m not good enough for you . . . not that I blame you. . . .”

“That’s not it,” she said quickly.

“I have never put on any pretences with you. . . .”

“Oh, no!” she said bitterly.

“I have told you the whole of my nefarious history. . . .”

“I wouldn’t care if you had committed a murder!”

“I suppose people warn you against me.”

“Oh, yes. Everybody. I don’t listen . . . I live only for the hours I spend with you.”

“Same here,” put in Joe.

Elaine looked at him involuntarily. The little hollows in her cheeks darkened; and her eyes became liquid with bitter mirth. She laughed shakily, unaware that she was laughing; paused as if startled by the sound; and resumed in her former toneless voice: “From the first moment that I saw you in the field at Piping Rock I was lost. It was your damned insolence. In half a glance you knew you had me.”

“Insolence was your line,” said Joe laughing.

“Then it was a kind of retribution,” she said darkly.

“You looked at me as if I was something dirty in the road.”

“You knew you had me!”

“Well, you had me, too.”

She shook her head. "There was triumph in your eyes."

"All a bluff," said Joe; "a man's supposed to look like that. . . . Why, for weeks after that whenever we met, you went out of your way to insult me."

"A fat lot you cared!" murmured Elaine.

"And the first night I tried to kiss you," said Joe chuckling; "Gee! . . . Remember? Cave woman act. No man ever took worse punishment for a kiss."

"You knew you had me," murmured Elaine. "You laughed. . . . Oh, God! why does it have to be so one-sided!"

"Now who's agonizing?" said Joe, going to her. "One-sided nothing! We're both crazy. It's just as it ought to be. We would be as happy as kids if it wasn't for outside interference . . . I can see exactly what has happened. Your folks have been keeping after you about me, until you're half hysterical. Well, it's nobody's business but our own. I am able to take care of you. Let's steal away by ourselves and get married. We are free, white and twenty-one. That's the way to stop the uproar. Nobody bothers about a thing once it's done. To-morrow, Princess—or to-day! now! My car is at the door. Then good-bye to all worries. Nothing but happiness—Oh, my God! think of it. . . . Go get your hat and coat!"

Elaine shook her head.

Joe drew her back from the window. Holding her within one arm, he roughly pressed her hair back from her forehead, and kissed her eyelids. "You can't fight against this thing, sweetheart," he whispered. "It's stronger than we are. The more you try to fight it, the stronger it gets!"

"Oh, don't!" she whispered between his kisses. "I know it. . . . Oh, if I could stay like this forever! Oh, God! if I didn't have to think!"

"Stop thinking, dearest dear. Come with me and stay with me forever. Come now! . . ."

She withdrew herself from his arm. "I will not," she murmured.

Joe returned to the fireplace and flung himself into one of the big chairs. "Oh God! you do try a man's patience!" he exclaimed. "You want me, and you don't want me! Where is this going to end?"

"I'm afraid of you," Elaine said suddenly. She had turned, and was looking at him somberly. The fear she spoke of was not evident in her glance.

Joe laughed softly. "That's flattering," he said: "for you're the bravest woman I know."

She went a step or two towards him. She seemed to speak by a power outside herself. "In our maddest moments your eyes are still measuring me. You never lose yourself. . . . You should not have forced me to speak of this. I see that all the things I ordinarily say are mere nonsense—like the noises made by savages to keep devils off. . . . You have roused a fever in me that is burning me up. . . . But . . . but . . . I don't want to have a child. . . ."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Joe, startled, showing his teeth.

The jangling voice recalled her to herself, wincing. She walked unevenly up and down. "The nonsense that they teach girls!" she murmured. "It made a rebel of me. I had prudence and obedience and chastity thrust down my throat until I fell in love with everything that was reckless and bad. I understood the devil worshippers. That's how you got me. . . ."

"I don't care how I got you," said Joe with a secret smile.

She came to a stop. Her eyes were widely distended and quite unseeing. She made vague passes with her hand in the effort to express the inexpressible. "But all that stuff I laughed at . . . religion . . . all that stuff . . . is getting back at me . . . I mean may be it is . . . all kinds of things are working inside me . . . maybe there's something in it. . . ."

"You're talking wildly!" said Joe.

She shook her head. "I never got so close to naming it before . . . the thing you don't talk about . . ."

"Come here," said Joe, half contemptuously.

She shook her head inattentively. "Let me be. . . ."

He stood up. "Come here!" he said, peremptorily.

She looked at him reluctantly—and lost herself. A deep blush overspread her pale skin; her face became irradiated with a confused and imploring smile. She went to him slowly; shamed and rapturous.

Joe had dropped back into the big chair. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he pressed her down to her knees at his feet. "Put your arms around my neck," he commanded.

She obeyed. He pressed his lips to hers.

"Now . . . *now* tell me if there is anything in life that matters beside this," he said breathlessly.

"No! No! No!" she whispered passionately. "I want only you!"

"You see, you'll have to marry me!"

"No, Joe!"

"But I say you shall!"

## VII

ON a mild, bright afternoon, Elaine and Wilfred ran down the steps of the Sturges house, and turned east. Wilfred had enjoined Elaine to dress plainly; and she was wearing a severe tweed coat, and an inconspicuous hat bound round with a veil. Thus clad, her brave air was more apparent than ever. Wilfred's heart beat high. Leaving behind them the big house which typified Elaine's crowded exotic life, he felt for the first time that he had her to himself. Looking at her, he thought: It is impossible that Joe could reach his grimy paw so high! As usual, I have been tormenting myself without reason.

"Now elucidate the mystery," said Elaine. "Where are we going?"

"Into the East Side," said Wilfred. "My stamping-ground."

"Slumming?" she asked, running up her eyebrows.

"No, indeed!" said Wilfred quickly.

"Well, I'm thankful for that. I'm no slum angel. . . . But why should we go there then? It's not done."

"I haunt the East Side for my own benefit, not for the East-Siders'," he said. "I want to show you something real for once."

"You funny man!" said Elaine. "I suppose you think you are sincere in this nonsense."

Wilfred laughed.

"I warn you it is useless to expect me to be born anew."

"I don't," he said quickly. "This is no deep-laid plot. Your life suffocates me. I am never myself in it. I wanted to have you once where I could breathe: to drag you down to my level if you like. It's only for an hour. It won't injure you permanently."

"I am not afraid of being injured," she said a little affronted.

"You are afraid of being changed, though."

"Not at all!" she said stiffly. . . . "Still, I don't see why I have to be dragged through the slums. I shan't like it."

"Oh, your conventional nose will turn up at the smells, and your eyes avert themselves from the dirt," said Wilfred; "but there is a grand streak of commonness in you if one could only get at it."

Elaine looked at him a little startled.

"Instead of a young lady of fashion you ought to have been a camp follower of the Revolution," he went on. "I can see you shaking the Tricolor and yelling for blood!"



She liked this picture, and showed her white teeth. "You have the silliest notions about me!" she said scornfully.

They made their way through St. Mark's Place and East Tenth street to Tompkins Square. This neighborhood, still suggesting 1860, with its plain brick tenements of low height, and old-fashioned store-fronts was a favorite haunt of Wilfred's. It was still Irish-American New York, with the descendants of the original be-Jasus bhoys standing on the corners. It had the appeal of something doomed; for the old stores here and there were erupting in showy modern fronts; and the Jews were creeping in from the South.

Elaine did not get the special character of the streets, but any comely individual interested her. There was a stalwart young teamster unloading his dray, who, confident of his manhood, glanced sideways at Elaine with daring, mirthful eyes.

"What charming, wicked eyes!" murmured Elaine, after they had passed.

Wilfred felt a little crushed. His eyes were not wicked.

Proceeding farther east, they turned up-town, following always the last street on the edge of the Island. Wilfred found these forgotten streets full of character; the utilitarian steam-roller had not flattened them out. Actually, in the summer-time, spears of grass could be seen pushing up between the cobble-stones. There was a group of deserted buildings falling into ruin; and a little general store whose aspect had not changed since the days when New York was pure American; there was a smithy, which, lacking only a spreading chestnut tree, might have been transported entire from up-state. There was a yard piled with junk, which would have been fascinating to pick over; and there were high board fences with padlocked gates concealing mysteries. The inhabitants of the scattered dwellings in these last streets stared at the intruders like mountain folk.

He tried enthusiastically to convey it all to Elaine.

Looking at him with a quizzical eye, she asked: "Would you like to live over here?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Wilfred. "Isn't it refreshing after the awful sameness of the other streets?"

Elaine peered dubiously through a filthy archway leading into a dank, paved court. "Well, I don't know," she said; "I like a place that I know."

Farther up-town, they came to a wide waterside street which had lately been laid off on made ground. On the river side a row of big new piers had been built, sticking out into the river. As yet no sheds covered them; and it was one of the few places in the water-engirdled town Wilfred pointed out,

where one could see the water from the street. The great shipping interests had still to take possession of the piers; consequently a confused throng of humble craft were tied up there; including canal-boats; sailing-lighters (which had once been called periguas); little old steam-boats laid up for the winter; and a rigged ship or two, waiting for a charter. Many of these vessels revealed family life on board. The open piers were heaped with rough cargo that would take no damage from the elements. The whole made a scene irresistibly entangling to the eye.

On the landward side a raw building or two had been run up alongside the new street to house the inevitable saloon with its colored glass and gingerbread work; but for the most part the vista was of coal-yards, and yards for the storage of wagons at night. These were backed by the side walls of the tall new tenements in the cross streets—not so new but that the white paint was scaling off the bricks, and the fire-escapes rusting. From every floor of the tenements extended lines of flapping clothes affixed to tall poles in the rear. Looking through between the backs of the houses, one beheld a very blizzard of linen. The sun was preparing to descend behind the tenement houses, and over across the wide river, the ugly factories of the Greenpoint shore (no longer green!) were sublimated by his horizontal rays.

Wilfred looked around him with a kindling eye. Elaine, glancing at him askance, said:

“Interesting if not beautiful.”

“Oh, I’ve quit worrying about what constitutes beauty!” said Wilfred. “All I know is, this *bites* me. It’s because it sums up my town; the flapping clothes; the collection of queer craft; they could be of no other town; it’s New York!”

Crossing one of the streets leading away from the river, they saw a crowd assembling before the gates of a coal-yard. Little boys appeared from nowhere, running and crying in an ecstasy:

“Somep’n t’ matteh! Somep’n t’ matteh!”

“The rallying cry of New York!” murmured Wilfred. Anticipating ugliness, he took hold of Elaine’s arm to draw her on; but she resisted.

“Let’s see what it is,” she said.

Wilfred had no recourse but to follow her into the side street.

Two burly young men out of the coal-yard were fighting. It was a serious affair. Greasy with coal-dust, their faces dehumanized, there was nevertheless a dignity in the fighting look; hard, wary and intent. One was a mere lad; a young bull, with round head sunk between his brawny shoulders, and a remarkable mane of crisping black hair. The other, some years older,

was cooler and warier; not without grace. How vain this one's efforts! Though he was no older than Wilfred, on the plane of savagery his day was already passing; it was marked under his eyes. He might beat the lad now; but the lad would beat him next year. They were well-matched; they sparred smartly; and broke away clean; just the same there was a savage fury behind their blows.

Wilfred was a little sickened. Yet he had the envious feeling that these simple brutes possessed a key to life that had been taken from him, without any other being supplied. The younger man received a blow on the mouth that drew blood. He indifferently swept the back of his hand across his mouth, leaving a hideous smear. Had Wilfred been alone, he would have wished to see the affair to a conclusion, though he could not have borne to watch it continuously. His eyes would bolt, and have to be forced back. Now, with Elaine beside him, he was in distress, thinking of her womanhood exposed to such a sight.

"Come on! Come on!" he whispered urgently.

She turned a look of scorn on him. "You wanted me to see something real," she said. "Can't you stand it?"

"I was thinking of you," he murmured.

She seemed to have increased in height; and her face wore a hard, bright look; in fact, a reflection of the look on the coal-blackened faces. She is of them; not of me! Wilfred thought sadly. She had not lost the simple key of life—the heroic key; and alas! he was no hero. He no longer saw the fight. Before his mind's eye rose a picture of himself and Elaine yoked together and hopelessly opposed. Every advantage would be hers. It would be fatal for him to marry a woman with that strain in her, he thought; and at the same time his desire for her was increased tenfold, by reason of her savage, bright eyes.

There was no conclusion to the battle. A cry of "Cheese it, the cop!" was raised; and the two combatants, bolting through the ring that surrounded them, disappeared within the coal-yard. The spectators were left standing at a loss. A blue-coated officer approached with dignity from the river front.

"Hey! Move on there, youse!" he cried, disdaining to enquire into the cause of the gathering.

The people reluctantly made a pretence of moving this way and that; but scarcely left the spot. The bluecoat, with his Olympian air, went on a little way, and then came back again.

Still Elaine would not be drawn away. She saw a knot of people excitedly discussing the affair; and coolly elbowed her way in, leaving

Wilfred to follow at her skirt.

“Hey! Move on! didn’t I tell yez!” commanded the officer, heading for the group; and dispersing it with strong outward thrusts of his forearms. The elegant Elaine was thrust aside with the rest. Up to this moment nobody had taken any particular notice of her; but the policeman, observing her dress, looked her up and down with amazement. He did not, however, address her. Wilfred suffered acutely. Elaine, ignoring the officer, fell into step beside a girl who seemed to be the source of information, and Wilfred walked beside Elaine, feeling as ineffective as a toddling child.

“What started it?” asked Elaine, avidly interested.

The girl was a meager little thing, not more than sixteen years old. Her thin jacket was mended crookedly; her shoes ran over at the heel. She wore a big black lace hat, which projected far beyond her pompadour like a fan. She was not at all averse to talking. It was her moment. Everybody was trying to walk alongside her, pressing close to hear; some in front walking with heads over their shoulders; all mouths open.

“T’at utter fella,” she said; “I mean t’ old fella; he’s too fresh, he is. He t’inks he’s t’ hull t’ing! Me guyl friend, she lives next door to t’ coal-yard, see? and he’s all a time flirtin’ wit’ her at t’ winda. Just to show off to t’ utter fellas in t’ yard what a hell of a fella *he* was, understand?”

“Sure, I understand,” said Elaine.

“Well, it was all right until he begun to holler up at her,” the girl went on. “Then me friend’s old woman, she got sore, see? If he’d come up to her respectable in the street, like, she’d a gone out wit’ him, maybe—but to holler up at t’ winda like t’at!”

“No,” said Elaine; “it’s not done!”

“You’re right! It ain’t done! . . . So I says to my friend, I says, I’d stop by the yard when he was in on his cart, and I’d tell him real nice, to cut it out, see? And I did ast him just as polite, to cut it out, and he begun to get fresh wit’ me. An t’en t’ black-headed young fella he come in on his cart, and he up and tells t’ utter fella to cut it out. And t’ utter fella, I mean t’ old fella, he begins to cuyse. Such language! And me standin’ right t’ere all a time! T’en t’ black-headed young fella, he soaked him one, and t’ey went outside to settle it. . . . T’at old fella, he’s t’ bully of t’ hull yard. But he’d a got hisn to-day if t’ cop hadn’t a come. T’ black-headed boy’ll lay him out cold, yet!”

“He’s a handsome lad,” said Elaine.

“He is so, lady! And strong! My! He ain’t but nineteen year old, neit’er.”

“Shall you see him again?”

“Oh, he kin allus find me if he wants me,” she said with a toss of the lace hat. “I don’t live far.”

At the corner, the group broke up, and Wilfred was able to draw Elaine away at last. In his mind he was confused and bitter. Elaine scorned these people; yet she was able to talk to them without self-consciousness; he loved them, and could not. All his explorations on the East Side were conducted in silence. Not only was his tongue tied, but he knew he had an aloof air which prevented people from addressing him.

Elaine guessed what was passing in his mind. She said with a smile: “You see I am closer to them than you are.”

Wilfred said nothing.

“These people interest you, because they are strange to you,” she presently went on. “They are not strange to me. Just people. . . . All the same, I’m glad my great-great-grandfather made a lot of money! . . . Wilfred, if you lived over here, you’d spend your time walking up and down Fifth avenue, looking in the rich peoples’ windows, and dreaming about *their* lives!”

It’s true! thought Wilfred. She has her own fire, and doesn’t have to bother; but I can only go about warming myself at the fires of others!

They reached one of the little terraces on the East River cliffs. Elaine swung herself up on the parapet that closed the end of a cross street; while Wilfred standing below her, leaned his elbows on the stone. Off to his left ran a little street of brownstone houses a block long, with back yards dropping over the cliff. Darkness was falling; no one was in sight. Elaine drew the tweed coat more closely around her.

“Light a cigarette for me,” she said. “If anybody comes, I’ll hand it back.”

Wilfred’s lips caressed the cigarette as it left them. Fascinated, he watched Elaine’s cool fresh lips close upon the same spot. How sweet that vicarious kiss! He ventured to move closer to her; and at the touch of her body, a momentary benediction descended on his agitated breast—momentary, because he had that to say which would destroy it forever.

“Well, has it been a success?” he asked.

They had walked fast, and the flags were up in Elaine’s cheeks. “The walk, yes!” she said quickly. “But as for your East Side! . . . Well, I prefer the middle.” She shrugged good-naturedly. “I’m not a snob. I know these

people are every bit as good as I am; but I don't feel any call to herd with them."

"Oh well, let them go!" said Wilfred, smiling. (How useless this ordeal! But he had resolved upon it. As soon as it was dark, he had vowed.)

Elaine, glancing at him through her lashes, moved away ever so slightly. The move was not lost on Wilfred, but he stubbornly held to his purpose.

Looking out over the river, Elaine said quickly: "This view makes up for any amount of East Side!"

Wilfred, thankful for the respite, followed her glance. The stream was like a magical beam of twilight in the dark. It seemed to be the source of its own blue, darkling radiance. The fading sky held no such poignancy. The river was both still and subtly perturbed; like a smooth breast swelling upon inaudible sighs; like a quiet face working with obscure passions. Out in the middle rose the crouching black rocks off the point of Blackwell's Island; the island itself, appeared, pointing out of the obscurity like a gigantic black forefinger. On it rose the inhuman prison buildings. Architects are always successful in designing prisons, Wilfred thought. Further to the left, and high against the sky sprang the vast cantilever bridge, a rumbling portent of the Age of Machines.

Wilfred put his yearning hand upon hers. She snatched her hand away.

"Oh, Wilfred! not *that*!"

"Elaine, will you marry me?" he whispered.

"Oh!" she breathed crossly. "You know very well I don't love you!"

"Yes, I know."

"Then why on earth . . . ?"

"I wanted you to know that I loved you."

"I knew it. I am not blind."

"But I was forced to tell you . . . because it was so difficult."

"Oh, you ridiculous man! . . . I couldn't possibly fall in love with a man like you!"

"I know it," he murmured, while the iron entered slowly into his soul.

"You knew it all along," she said. "You are no fool. I was glad to have you come to see me, you're so intelligent. But I wondered why you continued to come."

"I couldn't help myself."

Elaine said no more, but looked out over the river, kicking her heel impatiently against the stone of the parapet. How deeply grateful Wilfred

was, to be spared her pity. How prompt and honest had been her response—like all her responses to life. While he backed and filled! He was not even sure at this moment that he wanted to marry her. Was there not a feeling of relief amidst all his pain? . . . Ah! if he might only hold her close, close in his arms and stop thinking!

He said: “You’ll catch cold if you continue to sit here.”

Lifting herself on her hands, she sprang down.

“We’ll have to walk a bit before we can hope to find a taxi,” said Wilfred.

“What’s the matter with the car-line?”

“All right. The nearest is on Second Avenue.”

They walked away from the river in a constrained silence. This was harder for Elaine to bear than for Wilfred. After awhile she burst out crossly:

“Oh, bother! You’ve spoiled everything!”

Wilfred smiled. “No,” he said. “You get me wrong. I am not bitter, because I expected nothing.”

“I think that’s just an attitude,” she said, looking at him shrewdly.

“Oh well, you’ll see—if you don’t cast me off.”

She impulsively slipped her hand through his arm. “Oh, Wilfred, I *do* want you for a friend!” she said. “I have nobody to talk to but you.”

Wilfred was very happy. He thought without bitterness: I suppose I am a poor-spirited creature. Thankful for small favors. He said: “Why not? That thing is cleared away now. There are no bars between us. That’s why I spoke.”

“You have already given me three different reasons for speaking,” she remarked acutely.

Wilfred laughed. “All true! Life is not so simple!”

“You’re a funny man!”

“You know nothing about men,” said Wilfred. “You only recognize one quality in men. You want me for your friend, yet you despise me because I am willing to come in on that basis.”

“Not despise!” she said quickly.

“Well, supply your own word.”

“I don’t mind if you scold me,” she said with unexpected humility.

Wilfred laughed again, not very mirthfully. “I can be honest with you now,” he said. “I have nothing to lose.”

She stopped. "I'll put your friendship to the test at once," she said abruptly. "Let's not go home. Let's walk for miles and miles. Have dinner out."

"Oh, *will* you!" cried Wilfred in delight.

"Well! . . . you're easily consoled," she said dryly.

"I can't help but be happy when you are beside me!"

She dropped his arm.

They turned Northward again. They went down hill under the bridge approach, and alongside the towering gas tanks. The next stage was marked by East River Park, with its row of fancy little brick houses, circa 1888; then through Pleasant avenue, a raw thoroughfare, belying its name; and finally through the secluded streets around the Northeast corner of the island, lined with gaily-painted wooden dwellings like a village. Not until they had reached the plaza where the red trolley cars start for the Bronx, did Elaine confess to being tired and hungry.

"Have you got enough money?" she asked like a boy.

Wilfred nodded. "We'll get on the El. and ride back to Sixty-Seventh street," he said. "There is a restaurant on Third avenue called Joe's, famous in its way; I expect it's like no place you have ever been in."

The neighborhood was not prepossessing; and neither was Joe's; a common-looking place with two rows of long tables, ended against the wall, like a Bowery restaurant.

Elaine looked about her with bright eyes. "I have never eaten in such a place," she said. "I shall love it!"

"It's not really as bad as it looks," said Wilfred. "The commonness is deliberate. It is designed to attract those who appreciate good food, but do not like to put on style."

"What a good idea!" said Elaine.

"Well, I don't know," said Wilfred. "Joe is a little discouraged. Style seems to be in the ascendant; and good living on the wane!"

"I can plant my elbows on the table, and slump down anyhow," said Elaine. "Do you think they will allow me to smoke?"

"We'll hazard it."

Wilfred insisted on ordering champagne.

"How silly in such a place!" objected Elaine.

"Oh, no!" he said. "Joe is prepared for it. . . . Besides champagne has a special virtue. It puffs one up."



Elaine pushed her plate away. "Wonderful food!" she said. "I'm as full as a tick!"

She lit a cigarette. There was no interference. Nearly all the other diners had left now. Wilfred was sitting opposite her with a smile etched around his lips; gazing at her with half-veiled eyes of pleasure. Elaine's look at him became quizzical.

"Why shouldn't I be happy?" he said reading her thought. "To-night I have had the best of you. Our walk together in the dark; our confidence in each other. If I were your husband I could have nothing better."

Elaine's smile broadened; and he perceived that she regarded this as mere sentimentalizing. Well, it didn't matter now. He smiled on. He made no attempt to explain that his exquisite happiness was due to the fact that his heart was big and soft with pain. Impossible to convey such things in words.

"Besides, I have confessed myself to you," he added. "I need hide no longer."

"You are hiding things from me now!" she said.

"Things, but not myself."

While she quizzed him, something was working behind it. Her eyes fell. "I wish I could be happy . . . like that," she murmured.

An apprehension of worse to come struck through Wilfred. "You must feel something the same as I," he said quickly.

"Something," she said. "You're a dear!"

The word chilled Wilfred. He hastened past it. "But not content?" he asked.

"Happiness seems to me to leave a bad taste in the mouth," said Elaine, affecting lightness.

An exclamation of dismay was forced from Wilfred. "Oh!" Obscurely he had felt that Elaine was unhappy; but this forced it on his consciousness. He was thrown into confusion. He could scarcely conceive the possibility of pitying the glorious Elaine. She suffering too—but not for him! Still . . . fellows in pain! Compassion welled up in his breast. Compassion is most due to the strong, he felt.

"That's just a phase," he said quickly. "You knew the feeling of ridiculous happiness when you were a child."

"Oh yes," she said, "and later than that. That feeling is natural to me."

"It will come back."

"I wonder!"

“There’s a cloud over your sun at the moment; that’s all.”

“What do you mean?” she asked with a hard look, jealous of her secret.

It intimidated Wilfred. “I was only speculating,” he said, his eyes trailing away. Inwardly he was in a panic. Was it Joe? . . . It could not be Joe. . . . But he knew that it *was* Joe! The thought was like the recurrence of a madness. He fought against it blindly. . . . She had not succumbed. She was fighting. Something must be done to help her! . . .

Elaine said, gloomily resting her chin on her palm: “Nobody can help anybody else, really. Each of us has his own particular hell.”

“People *could* help one another if they were sufficiently honest,” Wilfred insisted. “It requires a terrifying honesty. Once or twice in a lifetime, maybe . . . I’ve been helped.”

Elaine’s look upon him was scarcely flattering. It said: Your case is hardly the same as mine!

Something must be done! Something must be done! the panic-stricken voice cried within Wilfred. He despaired of finding the right words to say. He said nothing.

“When you’re faced by a serious problem, should you listen to your heart or your head?” asked Elaine, flicking the ash off her cigarette.

“To both,” he answered.

“That’s merely silly,” she said with curling lip. “If they’re warring voices.”

Wilfred flushed. “I was wrong,” he said. “It’s confusing. . . . I never can speak without thinking. You should listen to your heart always.”

“Ah!” she said, with the air of one who had caught him out. “Then you believe that passion should override everything; all considerations of prudence; everything!”

Wilfred felt his lips growing tight. “Passion does not always come from the heart,” he said. “As I understand it.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is infatuation.”

At that word Elaine ran up her eyebrows in two little peaks; but Wilfred somehow found the courage to face her out. A silence succeeded, which shook him badly. A gush of foolish, emotional speech filled his mouth like warm blood. He grimly swallowed it, waiting.

“Suppose one experienced a violent passion,” asked Elaine, with a casual air which concealed nothing from the man who loved her, “how on earth would one know whether it was love or infatuation?”

“By the quality of the object,” he said quickly. “If it was worthy. . . .”

“That’s nonsense!” she said scornfully. “If you were infatuated you would think the object was glorious anyhow.”

Wilfred shook his head. “That’s where the heart comes in. No matter how blinded we may be, we each have a voice in our breasts that whispers the truth. Only we don’t want to listen.”

“You must have a well-trained little prompter!” said Elaine.

He looked at her. He could bear her gibes. He held his tongue, waiting for the right word.

She said: “I’d have to have some surer guide than mysterious inner voices.”

“That’s easy,” said Wilfred quickly. “If your passion is for a worthy object you feel proud; if it is not worthy, you suffer like the devil.”

“I wasn’t talking about *my* passion,” said Elaine laughing; but her long-lashed eyes were dreadfully haunted.

“Oh, sure!” said Wilfred, grinning like a man on the rack. “That’s just the clumsy English language!” . . . Why can’t we speak out! he cried to himself; I love her so!

“Well, having got thus far,” said Elaine with a sprightly air that was almost more than he could bear; “having recognized that one is the victim of an infatuation, how is one to set about curing oneself?”

Wilfred shook his head helplessly.

“What! has the doctor no remedy to offer?”

“Leave it to time,” he murmured.

“That might work in the case of an elastic nature,” said Elaine. “One of those natures that snaps easily in and out of entanglements. But there’s another kind; stubborn.”

Wilfred could not speak. Something inside him was pressing up, and he could not force it back. It was stopping his throat; he struggled for breath. . . .

“Anyhow,” said Elaine, raising her chin, “I don’t admit your absolutes of love and infatuation. What’s the difference between them? It’s all in the point of view. It’s not the object that matters, but the feeling!”

The constriction within Wilfred suddenly broke. He heard with a feeling of surprise, a low, shaken voice issuing from between his lips. “Oh, Elaine! you couldn’t! He’s rotten! I am not quick to discover evil in people. But this man is altogether evil. . . . Never mind about his life. I expect he’s told you;

he always does. What he's done doesn't matter. It is what he is! Your nature is clear and open; you *must* feel it . . . !"

Elaine after a quick glance of astonishment, listened with curving lips. "Of whom are you speaking?" she asked.

"You know," he said, suddenly dashed.

There it was out! He need not have been so terrified, because Elaine was equal to the situation. She shrugged. "Oh well, it's no secret that Joe and I are pals. I should hardly come to you for a testimonial of his character."

Her remote glance, full of pain, assured him that her inner self was listening to his words. It enabled him to bear her scorn. "Worse than positive evil," he said. "It's a sort of ghastly sterility. He's a monster! He cannot feel anything."

"Oh, I assure you, you are wrong about that," said Elaine with her tormented and contemptuous smile.

"Lust," he said very low, not able to look at her then.

"Well?" she said simply.

Wilfred was struck dumb by that query. Why not lust? Well . . . why not . . . ?

In a moment he went on: "You must not think that I am merely jealous. I have no hopes. If Joe had never existed, you would not have cared for me. Remember too, that I've known him for ten years. This is not something that has sprung into my mind since I learned that you. . . . You *must* believe that I am honest! I love you! If it was anybody else but him. . . . I haven't seen Joe but about half a dozen times in my life. From the first he has represented to me the principle of evil; that which destroys us! I have seen how he debauches everyone with whom he comes in contact. He calls to the evil in the natures of others. He goes on unharmed because he feels nothing. The thought that he might obtain a hold on you, a permanent hold. . . . Oh God! it won't bear speaking of! It is too horrible. . . ."

He jumped up as if he were about to run out of the place.

"Steady!" whispered Elaine. "People are looking. . . ."

He dropped into his chair; his startled eyes darting around.

After a silence, she said sullenly: "This is just emotional stuff." She turned her cheek on her palm, half averting her face from him. ". . . Anyhow, I'm not engaged to him."

"I know the nature of the spell he exerts over you," Wilfred went on more calmly. "I have seen it working; I have felt it myself in a different way. It is horrible and irresistible—yes, and delicious, too. Delicious! I say this,

because I must force you to see that I understand. I don't blame you for feeling it. . . . You think that I'm something less than a man—Oh, well, never mind about me! . . . But I want you to know that I never put you on any silly pedestal. I love you because you're warm and human, and of the same flesh as me. I don't blame you. . . .”

“Thanks!” drawled Elaine. Her eyes were hidden from him.

“. . . I don't see how you're going to resist it. A pure and passionate woman! But marriage. . . . Oh, God! . . .”

“What's the alternative?” she murmured.

“Give yourself to him,” said Wilfred quickly.

Elaine jerked her head up, staring at him in pure amazement.

“That startles you?” he asked somberly.

“Not the suggestion,” she said. “I'm no bread and butter miss. But that it should come from you . . . !”

“Oh, leave me out of it! Look on me as a sort of disembodied voice. . . . It would be better than marriage, wouldn't it?”

No answer from Elaine.

“This thing is strong only when you oppose it. Give in to it, and you'll discover its insignificance. . . .”

Elaine looked at him startled; then closely hid her eyes again.

“. . . Bad morality, but good commonsense,” said Wilfred with a jangling laugh.

Elaine said in her casual voice: “They say that infatuation grows on what it feeds upon.”

“I don't mean for a night,” he said bluntly. “Go away with him. Stay with him as long as you want. He could not take anything from you that mattered, if you were not bound. . . .”

She gave no sign.

“He might reject your offered sacrifice,” Wilfred went on grimly. “Marriage with you is what he wants. It would be a fine thing for him. You'd have to insist. . . .” Wilfred's voice began to shake. “Ah, do not fight yourself until you are worn out! Beware of that fatal moment of weariness, when you are willing to give into anything!”

“Would you take me when I came back?” asked Elaine in an ironical voice without looking at him.

“Like a shot!—if you wanted me. However, I have no illusions about that. . . .”

Elaine laughed shakily, and bestirred herself. "What a lot of nonsense I'm letting you talk!" she said in an insincere voice. "One would think I only had to get on a train with a man to solve all problems! The Lord knows, I'm not squeamish; but after all, society is organized on a certain basis; and I'm not prepared to. . . ."

"Now who's a coward!" cried Wilfred, facing her down. "You have accused me of it often enough—by implication. But at least I will face things . . . even this! . . . What do you want? The sanction and blessing of society on such a thing?"

She shook her lowered head. "Not really," she said very low. "It's just that I doubt the efficacy of your remedy. . . ." Then lower still: "I think . . . that you underrate the strength of such a feeling . . . in a woman . . . well, in me!"

"Perhaps I do," he said with a dreadfully sinking heart. "I am not pure. I never was pure. . . . But, Elaine, not marriage! . . . Oh, not marriage . . . !"

"Come on," she said. "The waiters are fidgeting. They want to close."

## VIII

**S**HE had a sweet, bell-like soprano, which commanded great applause; but Wilfred disliked to hear her sing. A little too bell-like perhaps; a suggestion of the metal, however silvery. He was reminded of huskier and less admirable voices, which nevertheless had the power to bring tears to his eyes. But of course he applauded Daisy with the rest. He had met her three times on the occasions of Ladies' nights at the dinners of a little club to which he belonged. She sang for her dinner. He was not in the least attracted to her; but in a circle of serious-minded men, mostly married, it was up to him to prove his mettle. He could not have allowed one of the dull fellows to carry off the only girl in their midst. She was a girl; but not a particularly young one; fully Wilfred's own age. So he had taken her home each time.

She was pretty enough to gratify his fastidiousness, especially as it was not an obvious prettiness. She wore glasses, which gave her rather the air of a young school-ma'am; and it was only after reaching a certain degree of intimacy, that you discovered there were lovely blue eyes behind the glass. She had too, an admirable straight, short nose, and a sweet-lipped mouth, a thought too small. Her body was well enough. She gave an impression of thinness which was illusory. She was a coquette, and a great fool; and conversation with her was a weariness to a young man who had a good conceit of himself, owing to her ridiculous assumptions. But old men and unattractive men crowded around her.

Wilfred had always found a certain stimulus in the society of a coquette. It would make him a little indignant to see other men willing to subserve their pretensions; and when opportunity offered, he was eager to undertake the rehabilitation of his sex. Moreover, it was amusing to observe the astonishment of a coquette when her queenship was coolly questioned. Derision was devastating to coquettes. Unfortunately, the game was too easy. There was no glory in making a conquest of a coquette. Dethroned, she forthwith grovelled.

Daisy lived far up-town. She shared a tiny flat with a girl who was a trained nurse. To-night in order to make the long journey tolerable, Wilfred set about provoking Daisy to wrath.

“What a pretty little wife Dexter has!” he remarked.

“Do you think so?” said Daisy melodiously.

“Such eyes, such teeth, such hair! I don’t blame him for keeping her close.”

“That is just what you would do, isn’t it?”

“You bet I would! . . . Sweet enough to eat! Think of having *that* to fetch your slippers!”

“Yes, she looked like a slipper-fetcher,” said Daisy.

“You wouldn’t fetch a man’s slippers, would you?”

“You are merely being fatuous!” she said.

“. . . Like a delicious kitten!” said Wilfred. “All soft and downy!”

“They live in the Bronx, don’t they?” enquired Daisy, feeling of her back hair. “She looks as if she had her clothes made near home.”

Wilfred hooted. “You can’t bear to hear another woman praised!”

“Not at all!” said Daisy with dignity. “I enjoy looking at a pretty woman as much as a man does. I have always said so. Women are nicer to look at than men, any day. And a woman is a far better judge of another woman’s looks than any man is!”

“Maybe so,” said Wilfred. “But a pretty woman isn’t pretty for women.”

“No, only for the lords of creation, I suppose.”

“You’re rather pretty yourself,” he said casually appraising her.

“*Merci, monsieur!*”

“But you give yourself such airs!”

This line served very well for half a dozen stations on the elevated. Daisy stiffened her back as if she had swallowed the poker; and her eyes shot sparks of pure anger through the glasses. All very well; good fun as

long as the sparks flew; but when, at last, she began to pull down the corners of her babyish mouth, Wilfred suddenly sickened.

Turning her blue eyes reproachfully on him, she murmured: "Why are you so hateful to me?"

His eyes bolted. Why can't she play the game? he thought ill-temperedly. Lord! if she turned soft, she would be quite unendurable. He cast hastily about in his mind for some expedient to tide him over the remaining stations. He happened to remember that the trained nurse was engaged on night duty at the time. Affecting to yawn, he said:

"Gosh! I hate to think of the long trip back again!"

"It's not my fault that you live so far down-town," she said.

"Believe I'll stay all night with you," he said, very offhand.

Daisy was electrified. "How dare you say such a thing to me!" she cried. "How dare you . . . !"

This was splendid! It produced the briskest quarrel they had ever had; and the rest of the stations passed unnoticed. It carried them down the stairs, along Columbus avenue, and around the corner to the door of the apartment house where she lived. Wilfred was tired of it by this time; and hailed his approaching deliverance with relief. Never again! he promised himself. She wasn't amusing even in her anger. What an unworthy and trumped-up business this girl-chasing was, anyhow!

"In all my life I have never been so insulted!" she was saying. "I never want to see you again until you are prepared to apologize. . . ."

This brought them to the steps of her house. They discovered that the darkened vestibule was already occupied by a couple engaged in the business of saying good-night. Daisy quickly caught hold of Wilfred's sleeve, and pulled him by. A light broke upon him. She intended that he should stay! He trembled with internal laughter. His heart began to beat faster. They walked on a little way in silence. Wilfred, grinning, studied Daisy's face in the light of a street lamp. It still bore an expression of ferocious outraged virtue. What somersaults women could perform without losing their faces!

When they got back, the vestibule was empty. He followed Daisy into the house without anything further being said; and into her own little place on the first floor above. She closed the door, and turning around, began in pathetic accents:

"Now that you've forced your way in here, I hope. . . ."



Wilfred laughed; and seized her rudely in his arms. An instinct told him that she adored being treated rudely. He carefully removed her glasses, and put them on a table. There was light enough for him to see her charming, vague, shy eyes. He discovered that he clasped within the too artful clothes, the body of a very nymph with slim, boyish legs, round arms, and small firm breasts.

“Ah, you pretty thing! you pretty thing!” he murmured, heartily enough.

“Oh, Wilfred, spare me!” she pleaded. “Not that . . . Wilfred!”

“What did you expect?” he asked, between his kisses. “That we’d sit here and hold hands?”

“But Wilfred, I’ve never . . . I’ve never . . .”

“Then it’s high time you did!” he said, laughing and kissing her.

“Oh, you’re so masterful!” she breathed.

Wilfred’s arms relaxed. Startled, he tossed his head up, and stared into the dark. *Masterful!* Of course, when one didn’t give a damn! What a horrid joke this business . . . !

However, there she waited, expectant. And after all she was very sweet. One couldn’t be wretched all the time. Here was a drug for wretchedness. He kissed her again.

“What was the matter?” she whispered.

“I thought I heard something,” he said with a lip that curled in self-mockery.

“We are quite safe,” she whispered, wreathing her white arms around his neck.

## IX

— Hospital,  
St. Louis.

Dear Wilfred:

I came here because it was a good way off, and I wanted to make a clean break with everything.

Besides, I was attracted by the reputation of Dr. Shales, whom they call the greatest surgeon in the world; the superhuman butcher. He’s the bright, particular star of this institution. It was rather a let-down to discover that dozens of other girls from all parts of the country had had the same idea. They flock here in droves. The majority are quickly sent home with fleas in their ears. But I was accepted. I suppose you’d say, you idealist, that there was something fine in this crusade of women to serve under the banner of

pure intelligence and skill. But that's not the half of it, dearie. There's sex in it too. But not in my case. There's sex in everything, isn't there, like those horrid little bugs under damp wood. You'd understand what I mean if you could hear the nurses talking amongst themselves. Our God, the doctor, is the sole topic. But not much about his intelligence and skill. Not that you'd notice! Oh well, I suppose he's only human. If you were to believe them, he's a monster! Thank God! I'm no idealist! I've got no illusions to be shattered.

My family as you may guess, kicked up a horrid clamor at the idea of my entering for training here. The poor dears! I suppose it *was* a shock! As usual, I was called absolutely hard, unfeeling, etc. However, they did not say the final word to prevent my coming, suspecting perhaps, an alternative even more dreadful. I didn't tell them until my bag was packed, and I was ready to walk out of the house. Thus the scene was confined to one tempestuous half hour. I hadn't told a soul else. Of course I have been getting letters in sheaves since I arrived. Sickening, isn't it, how people give themselves away when they take their pens in hand? One or two of my friends wrote praising me for the step I had taken. Those letters infuriated me. I mean, that anybody should have the cheek to impute pious motives to me. I wrote deliberately insulting replies. Yet I suppose you'd call them my best friends. You don't need to tell me that I am acting a bad part. I know it. How can I help myself? I have heard nothing from you. Perhaps you didn't know where I was, since it has been kept out of the papers.

As a probationer they have set me to work cleaning up the diet kitchens, dispensaries, etc. I have learned to scrub. Actually! Right down on my marrow bones with brush and pail. If the Avenue could see me now! We work from seven to seven. It's a ghastly grind, because they deliberately overwork us at first in order to weed out the weak sisters. Well, I'm strong. I can stand it, but I'm getting as gaunt as an alley cat. On my afternoons off, I dress up in my most flaunting clothes, and rouge my cheeks, and sally forth. —And then I come back again! Never let anybody persuade you that there's any dignity in filthy labor! Nor that it conduces to serenity of mind! I wouldn't mind if there was any *use* in it. Oh, God! how I hate this place! I can't imagine why I ever came here. I can't give it up either, after all the fuss that everybody has kicked up. The girls of my lot here have made a sort of hero out of me. They're poor creatures. This is bad for me, because it leads me into a swagger. I've been in hot water more than once. I can't stomach these head nurses, etc. Take a barren, starved woman, and give her authority over a lot of blooming, sniggering girls, and the result is hellish.

Life seems to lead us into one trap after another. You notice I blame life. I'm so damn conceited. I suppose that's what the matter with me. In my heart I still think there's nobody in the world quite like me. Yet I hate myself too! You shook me a little, and I can't thank you for it. Didn't shake me hard enough, I guess. It hasn't done any good; it's only made life infinitely harder. I wish I'd never met you! Of course I don't quite mean that. Once I was happy. Lord! what rosy illusions I had about life and love and playing the game. That was my slogan: To Play the Game! I never noticed that I was apt to make the rules to fit my own desires. Now I have flopped into a sort of sink where everything is smeary. . . . I grind my teeth and snarl. I have discovered that I am cowardly, too. That's the bitterest pill of all. For if I could, I'd shut my eyes and eat lotuses. I would! I would! I'd crawl back into my fool's paradise on any terms, only the crystal dome is busted. I know there is no escape *that* way, and I can't face the other.

Burn this Old Top, and forget me.

Yours,  
Elaine.

South Washington Square.

Dear Elaine:

When I read your letter my impulse was to jump on the first train. The pull was awful! A cry for help from *you!* Very likely you would deny now that it was a cry for help. You carefully avoided mentioning the things that were at the back of your mind. But I could read them. Don't worry; I'm not going to drag them into the light. Call it just a cry of pain, then. I know what the pressure must have been that forced it from your lips.

But you see I have not come; and I am not coming. From the first my better sense warned me that it would only make things worse. If I saw you I would only lose my head, and babble weak, emotional stuff that would humiliate me, and disgust you. That's the writer's penalty. It is my business to express vicarious feelings. When my own heart froths up I am helpless. That arouses your contempt. What you do not consider is, that at the center of all this flutter there may be a firm core, worthy of your respect. I suffer horribly from the inability to express my feelings thoughtlessly. By staying away from you, perhaps I can remain a sort of fixed point in your confused horizon. The fact that you wrote to me at such a time shows that you regard me in some such light. I must take what satisfaction I can out of the assurance that you could not have let yourself go with anybody else like that. You know these things already. The ghastly part is, that knowing them

doesn't alter the situation. All we can do is to make private signals to each other across the gulf. So I am not coming. To see you now; to have you shrink from my touch, would about finish me. I am glad you let yourself go by letter, and not in speech. I could not have endured that! If I grovelled and stammered at your feet, your last illusion, which is me, would be gone.

I tried to write you last night, but I was too much confused. I was blind. I am not the one to help you. The only way I can help you is by being baldly honest. I had to force myself to think. Do not despise the man who is forced to stop and think when his feelings are rushing him away. It is the need of my nature. It is the one thing I have to hang on to in this whirling chaos. And the feelings are not necessarily any the less genuine. At least I am never finally deceived by the sound of my own roaring.

I walked all night. I don't know that I'm any clearer in my mind this morning because of it, but I'm dog tired. I'm beyond the point of considering what I say. I tore up half a dozen letters last night. This one has just got to go, and God help us both. Whatever I say, or do not say, it will not mend the situation. One thing stands out starkly: the touch of my hand revolts you. You made that fatally clear. Therefore, I've got to stay away from you. What did you write to me for? I can't help you. I'm a man, the same as that other. I can't be your confessor. You are contemptuous of my manhood. I'm not even going to try to give you any advice. Coming from me it would sound hollow. If you did what I told you to, you would just blame me for all the pain which followed. There's got to be pain anyway. You've got to make up your mind what to do, and swallow the pain; just as I've got to swallow my pain. We haven't had the best of luck, either of us. Well, I won't die of it, and neither will you. I am in a deeper hell at this moment than you will ever know. You, at least, have kept yourself taut, while I have been wallowing. With no excuse; no excuse! Your letter coming at such a moment—Oh, well, I've said enough. I loathe myself.

Wilfred.

It was Wilfred's newspaper that informed him of the romantic sudden marriage in St. Louis of Miss Elaine Sturges to Mr. Joseph Kaplan, both of New York. The popular society belle (so the account ran) tiring of the empty round of gaiety, and determined to do something useful in life, had gone to St. Louis without telling any of her friends of her intention, and had quietly entered the — Hospital as a nurse. It was rumored that family opposition to the Boy Wonder of Wall Street may have had something to do with her sudden decision. The Sturgeses were one of the proudest families in New

York, whereas young Mr. Kaplan was very much the self-made man, as everybody knew.

However that might be, Mr. Kaplan had finally learned of the whereabouts of his lost lady, and applying the same downright methods that had characterized his meteoric rise to fortune, had taken the first train to St. Louis. When he called at the Hospital, he had been refused permission to see Miss Sturges, since she was on duty. Nothing daunted, he refused to leave the place until she was produced, and the authorities were forced to yield. Miss Sturges was called out of the ward. A few rapid whispered words were sufficient. All in her nurse's uniform as she was, Mr. Kaplan bundled her into a taxicab, and they were driven to the nearest preacher. . . . And so on, and so on, for a column or more. . . . All the world loves a lover! . . . The honeymoon was being spent in Southern Pines. Later the happy pair would sail for Italy. . . .

Wilfred felt no surprise upon reading this, nor any strong emotion. He had been through that. Just a bitter sickness of heart. "So *that* is what it comes to!" he said to himself. Well, I suppose I may consider myself cured.

## X

UPON his return to town in September, one of the first persons Wilfred met was Jessie Dartrey. She belonged to the Fifty-Ninth street crowd, though she herself had no pretensions either artistic or literary. She and Frances Mary Lore were great friends. Not exactly a pretty girl, Jessie had a highly individual charm. Long, dark eyes, and a crooked mouth of great sweetness. Wilfred liked her she was "such a little woman." What was the right word for her; doughty? peppery? At any rate, discourse with her was stimulating. Wilfred had the impression that she cherished a particular scorn for himself; but he did not mind, it was so amusingly expressed. When Jessie was roused, she talked purest Saxon.

He met her on the Avenue as he was returning from a fruitless call at Frances Mary's flat. He had found the glass in the door dusty; and a faded card still in place, with the tenant's summer address.

"Hello!" said Wilfred. "I've just been up to see if Frances Mary was back."

Jessie's expressive mouth tightened for a flash at the mention of her friend's name, and Wilfred wondered what was up. Had the two quarreled? "No," said Jessie, readily. "She won't be back for another month. The hills are too fine to leave, she writes. And her work is coming well."

“Hard on us,” he said lightly.

Again that flicker of intense disapproval across Jessie’s face.

“Come and have tea somewhere,” urged Wilfred. “I’m just back myself. I’m starving for a little town talk.”

“So even I will do?” she said with heavy sarcasm.

Is she jealous? thought Wilfred. What a rum start that would be! “Your reasoning is faulty as usual,” he said. “There is great virtue in an accidental encounter. It has changed the fate of Kingdoms!”

“Sorry, I can’t give you the change to prove it,” said Jessie. “I’m booked for tea at a house in Forty-Seventh street. You can walk to the door with me if you want.”

He turned around, and accompanied her.

Presently she said with a sharp, sidelong glance of the sloe-black eyes: “You’re changed since I saw you.”

“How?” he asked, agreeably flattered.

“More conceited than ever!” said Jessie, suddenly changing her mind.

That was Jessie’s way. She had decided to conceal her real thought. In order to raise a dust, she rattled on: “You always look at me as much as to say: ‘Oh, mumma! look what the cat’s brought in!’”

Wilfred laughed, and felt uneasy. What had she seen? Was his face thus easily to be read in the afternoon sunshine of the Avenue? He made haste to give Jessie a humorous account of the boarding-house in the country that he had discovered for himself, and could not recommend. Jessie punctuated the story with scornful little snorts of laughter, shooting glances of her bright eyes into his face, that fairly snapped with some feeling mysterious to Wilfred.

Arriving before the house where she was expected, they paused at the foot of the steps. Said Wilfred, concluding his story:

“Above all, avoid a high-brow boarding-house. Intellectual table-talk is no compensation for watery hash.”

At that Jessie exploded. It was not a loud explosion, but it had force. “You make me sick, Wilfred! Does that reach you? I’d like to smack your grinning face . . . !”

“Why . . . go ahead!” said Wilfred, astonished, but grinning still.

“Don’t speak to me! Or you’ll make me say something I’ll regret! You’re a fool, do you hear? All men are fools, and you’re the greatest! Oh, I’d like to take you down a peg! I’d like to do something that would really *hurt* you! But you’ve got no feelings! You’re just a conceited grinner! Stand

there and laugh at me, do! Your mouth's too big; why stretch it wider? Oh, you're such a fool it's past all bearing!"

And with that, she scampered up the steps without a backward look.

Wilfred walked home thoughtfully. He was not in the least angered at Jessie, for her tirade had touched no sore spot. There had been something beautiful in it; a human who could let all fly like that. Oh, Jessie was as sound as an apple! He supposed that her scorn would do him good; there was no tinge of contempt in it. But what on earth was biting her? He was obliged to reject the imputation of jealousy. She had rejoiced in showing him that he had no power over *her*. He carefully went over her words, but without obtaining any clue. Her speech had the quality of pure vituperation, which bears no relation to the thing at issue. "Fool" was simply a generic term for one who utterly disgusted you.

Then a light began to break over Wilfred, and he became more thoughtful still. How strange if it should be *that!* he thought. . . . He slipped into a dream.

## XI

**W**HEN in the course of time, Frances Mary's door was opened to Wilfred, he experienced a disagreeable let-down. She was quite unchanged; just as good-looking; just as comradely. It was an offense in his eyes now. It might as well have been Stanny or Jasper; there was no thrill in it. What a fool he had been to let himself imagine things! . . . Why was he unable to fall in love with Frances Mary? It was because there was no trace of sex-consciousness in her to arouse a like feeling in him. In other words it was her finest quality which put him off. Same old vicious circle!

He was a little discomposed to find Jessie Dartrey sitting demurely in the warm-colored living-room. But her manner had undergone a metamorphosis. This afternoon the downright creature was almost anxiously friendly. Wilfred grinned at her mockingly; but even so, could not rouse her to battle. He interpreted her changed attitude as a plea to allow the little scene between them to be forgotten and buried—and especially not to let Frances Mary know about it. He was quite willing. He liked Jessie fine. Very soon she went.

Frances Mary brought out the tea-things; moving about the room in her large, graceful fashion. She was telling Wilfred about her summer in the Vermont hills. She had found a tiny shack, where she had lived alone, doing her own housekeeping. There were three delightful children who brought her supplies from the farmer's nearby. Jean Ambrose and Aurora Page had

had a house in the neighborhood. Frances Mary had made a new friend in a painter who had come to board at the farmer's; a diffident girl, who had come out wonderfully in the end. Other girls had visited Jean and Aurora, who possessed a spare room.

An Adamless Eden thought Wilfred, with a tinge of scorn.

Frances Mary told Wilfred briefly, of the completed novel she had brought back with her. It was the story of a woman who had married too late. She did not suggest on this occasion that Wilfred might help her with criticism. He felt a little jealous and sore. Will I ever have the constancy to write a whole book? he asked himself with a sinking heart.

In return he told her about the genteel boarding-house; and about his long walks over the Ramapo Mountains, which had reduced his mind to a state of comfortable vacuity.

"How is your work?" she asked. "Hasn't it been coming well?"

"It's been going well," he answered with a laugh. "I sold four stories in the Spring. That is how I was able to go to the country. I've got rid of three more since. I've been reeling them off."

Frances Mary glanced at him, to see how this was to be taken.

"Oh, I know they're putrid," said Wilfred. "I've discovered the combination. You take a thoroughly nice fellow, and a thoroughly nice girl, and you invent difficulties to separate them; then you remove the difficulties. There are three old fables that you can work ad lib; the Cinderella motive; the Ugly Duckling Motive; and the Prince in Disguise. Work in a bit of novelty into the setting, and your story is hailed as Original; a sure go! That's the sort of thing they fill the backs of the magazines with; they've got to have a lot of it."

Frances Mary said nothing.

"Well, I had to be writing something," he said; "or I'd have gone clean off my chump. That was the best I could fish up out of myself. The old keenness has gone."

"How about the mountains?"

"The mountains did things to *me*," he said flippantly; "but I couldn't throw *them*!"

"Isn't there good material in your social experiences last winter?"

"No," said Wilfred quickly. Fearful of betraying his inward shiver, he added: "It's been done too often. . . . There's no lack of material. The lack is in me."

She said no more on the subject.



Wilfred was sitting beside a little table covered with a scarf of coffee-colored Italian silk in alternate stripes, shiny and dull. On the table were some of Frances Mary's precious gim-cracks. She loved little objects of all sorts, if they had beauty. On this table, a row of books still in their paper wrappers; a white Chinese bowl, decorated with red fish, and filled with apples; a small censer of pierced silver; an enamelled snuffbox; some miniature ivory grotesques; a bit of cloisonné. Wilfred knew every object in the room.

Opposite him, sat Frances Mary by the tea-table, watching the kettle, which at this season did its work suspended over an alcohol flame. With her bright hair banded round her head in a style of her own; and wearing a soft draped dress the same color as her hair, what a grateful sight to the eye! Purely feminine; ladylike—horrible word for a lovely quality. What was the color of her hair? Wilfred had always termed it sorrel, but was dissatisfied with the word. Now the right word leaped into his mind; fallow! Of course! the color of the fallow deer! Fallow! a delicious word!—But Frances Mary's veiled level glance and reticent lips rejected passion. She seemed less sympathetic to him than usual.

In the silence Wilfred saw the abyss yawning at his feet, and shutting his eyes, leaped. His limbs were palsied; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He said stammeringly:

“Frances Mary, how about you and I getting married?”

She looked at him quickly, her face dimpling with laughter. “Why, Wilfred! Just like that! . . . You're not in love with me!”

“I'm fed up with love!” cried Wilfred, bitterly, before he thought of the implications of his speech. Panic seized him. “With the idea of love,” he hastily added, becoming aware at the same moment, that he was only making matters worse.

Frances Mary's lashes were lowered. Her face showed no other change. There was a silence. Having taken the leap, and not having met with annihilation, Wilfred began to discover resources in himself. After all, the whole truth had to come out; and it didn't so much matter if it came wrong end first.

“I don't expect you to give me an answer out of hand,” he went on. “We must talk it out. I know that this must appear to you like just another of my artificial, self-conscious flights, but if you will only have a little patience with me, I will convince you.”

“Could one marry from conviction?” she asked lightly.

“Yes!” he cried. “That’s the very point! The notion that passion must decide is fatal. I know it! I know it!”

“You may be right,” she said with a half smile that he could not interpret. “By all means let us talk it out!” Her serene glance was raised again; but it did not rest on Wilfred. She was looking at the kettle, meditatively. “If you do not love me, why do you want to marry me?”

“I *do* love you,” said Wilfred. “But not. . . .”

“Not passionately,” she quickly interposed, smiling and looking at him full; an extraordinary look of remote kindness.

Wilfred was silent. He was being put in the wrong, though he knew he was right.

“Well, your reasons?” she asked.

“You are the finest woman I know,” he said quickly. This was one of the questions he had imagined her asking. “I respect and admire you. My instinct tells me you will grow in my respect and admiration as long as I live. That’s the only thing that could hold me.”

She smiled again. He felt resentfully, that she was reading him through and through. It wasn’t fair, because he was all at sea respecting her. Still, everything had to come out!

“You feel that it is essential you should be held,” said Frances Mary, dryly.

“Oh Fanny, you make me feel so young!”

Again that smile from a distance. The kettle boiled; but instead of making tea, she put out the light. She looked about her. Fetching a little raffia basket, she commenced to sew a lace edging to a scrap of white stuff.

“To live with somebody you trusted!” said Wilfred, moved by his own words. “Somebody you could be yourself with; to whom you could reveal your innermost thoughts! To share the same tastes and pleasures! Somebody who could help you, and whom you might help a little—you have said it of me. Wouldn’t that be happiness?”

“You have pictured it all out!” she said smiling.

“Yes, I have!” he returned, goaded. “I have thought about it, and dreamed about it! I know you laugh at my mixed mental processes, at the way I deceive myself; well, I laugh too! Just the same you can build on dreams as well as thoughts. The soft stuff fades; but something collects little by little, just from one’s having been deceived so often.”

She disregarded this. “You do not know me,” she said quietly. “Nobody knows me. I have made a business of concealing myself. Even in my stories.

Everything I write is just . . . bravura! . . . You only imagine those fine things about me. Nobody is any better than anybody else—in some ways. If you thought you were getting a paragon you'd be frightfully sold . . . so would I!"

"Not a paragon," said Wilfred, smiling in his turn. "I know your faults."

"What are they?" she challenged.

"You are afraid of life. You hate your own emotions. You dissect them while they are alive. You are much too refined. Occasionally you ought to be beaten. You have lived too long in your mind; you ought to give your blood a chance!"

"What makes you say that?" she demanded, startled and affronted.

Wilfred shrugged. "I wasn't thinking," he said. "It just came out."

She quickly regained her equanimity. "Not bad as far as it goes," she said. "But you haven't touched on the worst things."

Her quiet bitterness struck a little fear into Wilfred's breast. *Was* there an unsuspected worst in Frances Mary? Oh, well, he was committed now; no choice but to struggle on. "You have one quality that I hold to through all," he said; "your disinterestedness. The finest quality of all!"

Her smile became still more remote. "Oh, it's easy to be disinterested about things that don't touch you too closely," she said.

This was a facer for Wilfred. He strove not to show it. "I'll take my chance of your soundness," he said.

She shook her head. "Passion, preposterous as it is, is the only justification."

"I could love you—if you gave me a chance," he said sullenly.

Frances Mary laughed suddenly and merrily.

"I know I'm ridiculous," he said blushing crimson; "but I mean to see it through. It's all got to come out, absurdities and all."

"Why marry at all?" she asked.

"I want you."

She looked at him.

"Well . . . need you."

"As a sort of antidote to passion, I take it," said Frances Mary softly. All the kindness had suddenly gone out, leaving her soft face pinched and awry.

Wilfred was stung beyond endurance. "Yes!" he cried, jumping up. "An antidote to passion! I've seen it and what it ends in. Am I criminal or foolish to dream of something better? I looked on you as a woman above prejudice.

It's easy enough to make a joke of me because I'm not playing the old false game with you. You've got everything on your side, the whole weight of the ages! But I won't be so easily shut up now; my foolishness has taught me something. There's something to be said for my way, though I'm alone in it. It's my real self I'm offering you; though I sound like a fool."

She had risen too, and walked away to a table between the windows where she stood with her back turned. "I'm sorry, Wilfred," she said in a muffled voice. "I shouldn't have said that."

When she apologized, it took all the fire out of him. "It doesn't matter," he said flatly.

Presently, she turned around; but, the light being behind her, he could not see her face clearly. "Your position is sound," she said, "and you have stated it better than you think. . . . Still, what you ask is impossible. For two reasons; first, I am not the woman you think I am; second, I must think of myself a little."

The cold voice completed Wilfred's demoralization. "I only admit the second reason," he said gloomily. "Of course you must think of yourself. I am seeking *my* good."

"Why should I marry you?"

"If you put it to me, the Lord knows!"

"I do not think you are the finest man I ever knew. In fact I have no illusions about you."

"So much the better," he mumbled.

"Then why? why?"

"Well, I thought. . . ."

"You thought I loved you?" she asked quickly.

"Not so far as that. I thought perhaps you might come to. There was sympathy. . . ."

She came away from the front table. Her hands were pressed against her breast; her face tormented. To Wilfred, who was wrought up too, that seemed natural. "Wilfred, tell me plainly what you have been doing these last months," she said breathlessly.

"I'll tell you," he said quickly, "I . . ."

A cry escaped her. "No! Don't tell me. . . .!"

But he was already under way. "I fell in love, as they put it, with a woman who preferred Joe Kaplan to me," he said bitterly. "You know all about Joe Kaplan. She married him. Well, that cured that. Afterwards I slid into an affair with a woman whom I despised. That soon ran its course. Then

I went to the country and tried to haul myself up by my own boot-straps without succeeding. That's all."

Frances Mary had returned to her chair. She was sitting forward in an attitude unnatural to her, her head lowered. "You experienced passion . . . for a woman you despised?" she murmured.

"Yes," said Wilfred. "That's the point I was trying to make. That's how easy it is. . . ."

There was a silence. Then Frances Mary said in an uncertain voice: "You had better go."

Wilfred stared. "I won't go for any such reason as that!" he said hotly. "Are you raising the banner of conventional morality! *You . . . !*"

She said: "Suppose I told you that *I . . . !*"

"Rubbish!" cried Wilfred. "It would be better for you if you had!"

"Your ideas are loathsome!" cried Frances Mary with unexpected loudness.

"This is what I get for trying to be honest!"

"*Honest!*"

Simultaneously it struck them what exhibitions they were making of themselves. They laughed in bitter vexation, and fell silent. They avoided each other's eyes.

"I apologize for shouting at you," mumbled Wilfred.

Frances Mary did not apologize, though she had shouted too.

Presently something changed in her. She looked at Wilfred queerly. Settling back in her chair, she raised her head. "Wilfred, kiss me," she said in a colorless voice.

He looked at her sharply. Her face was drawn and ugly. His instinct bade him refuse; but she had told him to do it. He was absurdly under her influence. He went to her with a hangdog air, and printed a cold kiss on her lips.

A little groan of rage was forced from Frances Mary. She sprang up so suddenly that her chair was knocked over backwards. All in the one movement, she fetched Wilfred such a smack on the cheek that his sight was blotted out for a moment. He fell back, covering the place, staring at her open-mouthed, clownishly. Frances Mary burst into tears; a catastrophic breakdown; her face working as absurdly and uglily as a small child's; the tears fairly spurting from her eyes. Wilfred quickly recovered himself. He had to repress a desire to laugh. A load was lifted from his breast. She could feel! Frances Mary put her hands over her face, and turned away from him.

“Go! Go!” she murmured.

Wilfred walked to the other end of the room, and sat down on the couch. “I won’t go till I get to the bottom of this,” he said.

“You see . . . you see . . .” she gasped out in her torn voice.

She loves me! thought Wilfred in a maze. She feels passion for *me*! What a fatuous brute I have been! . . . Still, the bars had to be smashed down one way or another!

“Now you see what kind of a woman I am! . . . You’d better go!”

“I don’t think any of the worse of you,” said Wilfred, smiling to himself.

Careless of her ugly, tear-stained face, she flung around, and stamped her foot. “Don’t sit there and sneer!” she cried. “It’s intolerable!”

“Sneer . . . !” he echoed indignantly.

“Disinterested!” cried Frances Mary. “Oh, Heavens! . . . I don’t think much of it! Your so-called disinterestedness is revolting to me! You talk by rote! Prating of love and passion! What do you know about either? You’re light! What is passion to you? An interesting experience! You have suffered, you say. You’re quite healed, aren’t you, and ready for fresh experiments? You know nothing of the agony of repression. For years! For years! Everything comes out of you like a child’s babbling. You know nothing of the wolves that tear. . . . Oh, why don’t you go?”

Wilfred recognized the element of truth in her portrait of him, but was not dismayed. He could no longer repress the delighted grin. “I’m not afraid of your wolves,” he said. “. . . I hail them!”

“Be quiet!” cried Frances Mary. But the new quality in his grin arrested her. She stared; her angry face all at a pause.

Wilfred stood up.

“Don’t come near me!” she cried sharply.

He laughed outright. “All right,” he said. “I’ll go. But this is not the end, of course.”

She drew the old veil over her face. But it was somewhat torn now. Picking up the fallen chair, she set it on its feet. “I’ll never marry you now!” she said with extreme bitterness. “However it might be for your good! Women can’t forget things as conveniently as men seem to do. This scene would always be present with me. Even when you began to love me—as no doubt you would! no doubt you would! having resolved upon it. I should always be remembering how you decided beforehand that it would be a fine thing for you if you could bring yourself to it!”

She doesn't mean a word of it! he thought with infinite relief and delight. She's no better than me! He said: "You're talking pure romantic nonsense! You might have got it out of one of my stories! . . . You've got something to learn too!"

"From your experience?" she asked with bitter nostrils.

Wilfred walked along Fifty-Ninth street, bemused with wonder. How extraordinary! How extraordinary! . . . Well, after all I didn't do so badly, considering . . . !

## PART FIVE: HUSBANDS



## PART FIVE

### I

ELAINE KAPLAN was writing a letter in the room that the servants called Madame's boudoir; but Elaine called it her sitting-room. Boudoir was a word she detested. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she sang out.

Her husband entered, smiling.

"Oh," she said, mildly surprised. "I thought it was Taswell. He sent word to ask if he could see me at four. . . . You are home early. Anything special?"

"No," said Joe. "I asked Fletcher to come here at four—I didn't want him to be seen at my office; and he's late. So I shall let him cool his heels for a few minutes."

"Something big on hand?"

"For him, not for me. The fool wants to sell me his newspapers, now that I've stolen their circulation."

"Am I to come down-stairs?"

"You can if you want."

"Mercy! I don't want to see old Fletcher. I just meant, is he to be entertained?"

"No," said Joe curtly. "Fletcher's on the toboggan."

He consulted a pocket note-book. "By the way, can you save the night of the fourteenth for me? Awful bore, but it would be advisable for us to appear at the reception for Sir Esme Dordress at the Union League."

"Surely," said Elaine, making a note on her desk-pad. "Who's he?"

"A governor of the Bank of England. . . . *En grande toilette*, my dear, which becomes you so well."

"Thanks. Hardly in the best taste at a club reception, is it?"

"Of course not. But all the other women will. We can let it be inferred that we are going on to something else, and get out early. . . . Have one of mine?"

"Thanks, I prefer these common ones."

Lighting up, Joe dropped into a deep chair, and stretched his legs luxuriously. "Young Taswell?" he said; "how is he making out with the

kid?”

“I can’t honestly say that he’s doing Sturges any good,” said Elaine; “but at least he’s doing him no harm.”

“Rather a fantastic idea, don’t you think? giving the kid a tutor at the age of six?”

“Well, I thought he ought not to be entirely in the hands of women. I have read Pastor Witt’s book on education. It is wonderful what can be done with them at such an age. But of course Sturges is different. . . . I wasn’t thinking of education so much, as of the masculine influence generally.”

“I would be no good as a nursery companion,” said Joe. “No use pretending.”

“I wasn’t reproaching you,” said Elaine with a clear glance.

“He’s a hard little nut, the kid,” said Joe, smiling at some recollection.

“So he ought to be at six,” said Elaine quickly.

“I shouldn’t think you’d get much literature to stick.”

“Don’t expect to. Taswell’s much more than a mere literary person. He’s an athlete. He has a very masculine point of view.”

“A gentleman, too,” said Joe agreeably. “Damned handsome fellow!”

“Oh yes,” said Elaine indifferently. “. . . I like him very much,” she went on. “He pockets his weekly wage, and keeps his head up. I have him to lunch with me sometimes. He’s interested in so many things. We have good talks.”

“I know just what you mean,” said Joe. “Disgusting, isn’t it? the way nearly everybody licks our boots. Takes all the fun out of life. I’d like to be better acquainted with this independent young man.”

Elaine offered no comment.

There was a knock on the door; and in response to Elaine’s summons, the one whom they had been discussing entered. A young man who brought with him into everyday affairs, a sharp reminder of that which is timeless. He was quite unconscious of it. A wary and a courteous young man, unabashed in Elaine’s boudoir, yet conveying an intimation that his astuteness was far from being the whole of him. The handsome older man received him all smiles; Elaine’s half glance acknowledged his good looks, but was annihilating in its impersonal quality.

Taswell, seeing Joe, stopped just within the door. “Oh, if I am intruding . . .” he began.

“Not at all!” said Joe cordially. “The appointment is yours. I was only warming a chair.”

Courtesies were exchanged. Joe remained standing.

“How are you getting along with your pupil?” he asked.

“As well as can be expected,” said Taswell coolly.

Joe laughed. “Are you fond of the little rascal?” he asked.

“He’s a splendidly healthy child,” answered Taswell.

Elaine, not looking at either man, frowned.

“What do you do every day?” asked Joe.

“We walk out for an hour if it’s fine,” said Taswell; “with such conversation, improving or otherwise, as may suggest itself. If we have to stay in, I read to him as long as he will listen; or help him to build something.”

“Don’t you hate to tote a kid around?” asked Joe in his friendly way.

“Not in the least!” said Taswell, smiling.

Joe laughed indulgently. “It’s not a job I’d fancy.” He moved towards the door. “Got a man waiting down-stairs. Hope to see you again.” The door closed behind him.

Taswell’s face betrayed no expression whatever; neither did Elaine’s. She changed from her desk to a more comfortable chair. She was wearing a loose-sleeved black dress which revealed how full of health was her pallor. The young man watched her, while courteously appearing not to do so.

“Have a cigarette,” said Elaine, waving her hand in the direction of the big silver box. “Tea will be up directly.”

Taswell noticed how the black sleeve fell away from the white arm. He proceeded towards the box. “You are very kind,” he said. “I’m afraid I cannot stay for tea.”

“I suppose it is something special,” said Elaine, “since you asked to see me.”

He did not answer immediately. He was staring down at the cigarette he had just taken. “I must give up my job, Mrs. Kaplan,” he said quietly.

“Oh!” said Elaine, with quickly falling face. “I’m so sorry! . . . I thought you liked it!”

“It was a wonderful chance!” he said. “I mean, to be able to earn my living with two hours’ work a day. You see I’m doing a book, biology, from which I can expect no immediate return.”

“Then why give up the chance?”

“I am doing nothing here.”

“But I’m satisfied. I didn’t expect a miracle!”

“The child is too young,” said Taswell. “I cannot get hold of him. The two hours a day is a trial to us both.”

“Then why did you tell my husband just now that . . .”

“Oh, he was simply baiting me,” said Taswell.

Elaine bit her lip.

Presently she said: “Is it because you dislike Sturges?”

“No,” he said promptly. “I like him!” The implication of this speech might have been had in the involuntarily warm glance which accompanied it, but which Elaine chose not to see.

“I mention that simply because everybody seems to dislike him,” she said proudly.

“He dislikes me very much,” said Taswell; “but that is quite natural. I am the Enemy, because I will not knuckle under.”

“I don’t knuckle under to him,” said Elaine quickly.

“Ah, you’re his mother; and he’s obliged to recognize you as a fixture. You must be circumvented; but I can be got rid of, if he is determined enough.”

“And are you content to be got rid of?”

“I know it’s my fault,” said Taswell. “I haven’t got the right sort of patience.”

“I don’t set too much store by patience,” said Elaine quickly. “If he’s naughty you ought to smack him. I would back you up. I smack him when he is naughty.”

“He is never naughty with you,” said Taswell with smiling lips and speaking eyes. His words carried two meanings.

Elaine’s answer had but one. “No! Because he knows what he would get! If you were to . . .”

“There is a difference,” Taswell pointed out, smiling. “Parental smacking is orthodox.”

Elaine got up impatiently. The young man’s eyes gleamed at the sight of that splendid straightening. She crossed the room, and came back. “You make him out a perfect little monster between you!” she said bitterly.

“Not I!” said Taswell, quickly. “But it’s a great mistake to suppose that children are not alive to things. There is a whole world of intuitive knowledge behind those bright, watchful black eyes of his.”

Elaine stopped short, looking at Taswell with a kind of horror. Several seconds passed before she spoke. “He’s just an ordinary naughty little boy!”

she said breathlessly. "There's nothing special about him! Just an ordinary little boy!" The words seemed to be torn from her.

Taswell's eyes expressed a wonder at the sharpness of her tones. "Of course!" he said. "Just a vigorous, strong-willed little boy. The real problem lies in your situation."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"You're so rich!" he said.

"What difference does that make to him?" she asked haughtily. "If he has always lived in a big house, where the wheels are greased, and the proper things appear at the proper times—if he has never known anything different, how could his character be affected by it?"

"It isn't the big house, and the comforts. It's being surrounded by servants; people subservient to him."

"That's why I wanted somebody like you."

"Exactly," he said good-humoredly. "But . . ." He spread out his hands.

"If you had a small son of your own," she demanded, not without scorn, "would you not know how to deal with him?"

"Oh, yes!" said Taswell quickly, with a secret look of resolution and amusement.

Elaine was a little baffled. "Take Nurse," she said argumentatively; "I searched over two continents until I found the one woman who . . ."

"An admirable person!" said Taswell. "I'm sure you couldn't do better."

They exchanged a look. Elaine was the first to turn her eyes away. A subterranean understanding was created; and because of it Elaine was silently obliged to abandon her position. She resumed her pacing. The young man watched her, clearly not thinking of the child.

Presently she began to speak in a low, moved voice, more to herself than to him. "I'll find a way . . . somehow! Not necessarily through books and learning. There are other ways of making a good life. . . . When he's a little older I will take him away. To Wyoming. There will be no servants there. I will ride with him, and shoot with him, and go on hikes. I can make a boy of myself . . . !" She turned on the silent Taswell as if he were opposing her. Her deep bosom rose and fell under the black silk; her glance made the young man think of Boadicea fronting the Roman legions. "In spite of everything . . . *everything*. I will make a man of him! *My* kind of man! Nothing can stand against a determination such as mine. Half of him is of me. I have character. I will strike it into him!"

Taswell had risen. His air of astuteness was gone. He gazed at her, rapt and saddened. It was not her words, but her look of indomitable despair. "Oh, Mrs. Kaplan . . . !" he murmured.

The sound of his voice recalled Elaine to her usual self. Turning, and affecting to straighten some objects on her desk, she said in a muffled voice: "You have been awfully decent. I quite appreciate your position. When would you like to go?"

He roused himself. He put down the cigarette which he had never lighted. "At your convenience," he said, lowering his eyes. "As soon as possible."

"You are quite right. There is no use dragging on with a situation once you discover that it has become impossible. You needn't come back to Sturges again."

"Thank you," he murmured.

She approached him as if to say good-bye. "I shall always be glad to see you, though. I'll send you a check."

Taswell, sensible young man as he was, was hurt to the quick. "Oh, Mrs. Kaplan . . . !" he said, very differently from the first time.

"Why . . . what's the matter?" asked Elaine, surprised.

He raised his eyes full to hers. "I love you," he said.

Elaine turned away with a quick movement. Taswell's eyes fastened on the white V of her back that showed, instinct with life, under the dead silk. After a moment or two she said coldly: "Why did you feel it necessary to tell me that?"

"I didn't 'feel it necessary'," he said sorely. "It sprang out of me. . . . What harm can it do? I am going."

"Oh, no particular harm," she said. "But I hate to be made to appear unfeeling. . . . All this sort of thing simply makes me impatient, it's so . . . so . . . I don't know. Men feel obliged to whoop themselves up to it, and women to simper." She looked around at him scornfully. "What, really, Taswell! A man of your capacity! How can you expect to do any serious work?"

"I can't . . . now," he muttered, avoiding her glance.

"Why, I must be seven or eight years older than you."

"Oh!" he said painfully, sweeping away the suggestion.

"Love . . . ! Bah! Excuse *me!*"

The young man raised his head quickly. A dark flush was creeping up from his neck. "I'm not ashamed of loving you, if it comes to that," he said.

Elaine, with a side glance at him, modified her tone. "I'm not getting at you, Taswell. You're an honest, generous fellow. I like you very much. You speak my lingo. . . . Much too good a fellow to be making love. I'm fed up with love. I'm sorry, but the mere mention of love brings out my worst side. Ugh! these fashionable women with their sleek lovers! There isn't a throb of honest passion in the pack of them! I *hate* love . . . !"

He raised his sullen eyes to hers again. That was just it! his eyes said. So do I!

"Once I suppose love was a splendid thing," she swept on, "but since we've become so civilized or self-conscious, or whatever it is, it has turned into rather a slimy business, don't you think? As soon as men began to dwell on their own animal instincts, and make up fine-sounding names for them—Ugh! what a nasty business . . . !"

"I should like to kill him," the young man murmured.

Elaine instantly threw off her preoccupation with love, and gave him undivided attention. "Now look here, Taswell, you're simply being carried away by an emotional tornado. Come to! Use you head, man! In order to justify your feelings, you are pretending to yourself that I'm a misunderstood and unappreciated woman cooped up here in my gilded cage, and all that rot! There is nothing in it! You've been in and out of the house during the last two months, and have used your eyes, I suppose. Well, I assure you, you have seen all there is to see. There is no horrid mystery. Nobody abuses me. Do I look like a woman who would submit to abuse? Should I ever be neglected, it would be because I willed it. I am happier than the run of women because I know exactly where I stand with myself!"

"That is worse!" he murmured.

"You are not listening to me!" she cried angrily. ". . . What is worse?"

"Wasted . . . ! A woman like you . . . ! Like a fire in the night . . . !"

"Oh my God!" cried Elaine. "Am I wasted because I choose to set my heart on a child, instead of a man? What a little you know!"

## II

**W**ILFRED raised his eyes from the typewritten sheets to ask sharply: "Are you listening Fanny?"

"Why of course!" she said, looking across in surprise.

"You seemed so intent on your stocking."

"That's automatic. My ears are yours. Go on."

Five minutes later, Wilfred turned over the last sheet. He tipped the tin shade of the lamp in order to direct the light more fully on Frances Mary's side of the table; and reached for his pipe. "That's about all I can do to that," he said, with an after gleam of pleasure in his eye.

"There are beautiful things in it," said Frances Mary.

Wilfred was pulled up all standing. "Things?" he said, looking across at her, flicked on the raw. "Then you don't think . . . ?"

"Something wrong," she said, avoiding his glance; thoughtfully biting the darning needle.

"Oh, for God's sake . . . !" said Wilfred, putting down his pipe.

"Why throw the second girl into the man's arms?"

"But I've made it clear from the beginning that she was the right one for him."

"I know; but the real business of the story is between the other two; and the pleasant touch at the end takes the edge off its grim reality."

"A happy ending is not in itself inartistic," said Wilfred combatively.

"Of course not! But in this case . . ."

"I could cut out their actual coming together," said Wilfred, very reluctantly; "and just leave the second girl in the offing . . ."

She shook her head. "The suggestion would be the same."

"It wouldn't sell," said Wilfred sullenly.

"This one was not supposed to be a seller," said Fanny. "This was your holiday."

"Damn it! if I cut her out altogether, I'd have to rewrite the whole thing!" he cried excitedly.

Frances Mary said nothing.

"Why didn't you say so in the beginning?"

"It just struck me, Wilfred."

He jumped up, half beside himself. "All my work has gone for nothing now!" he burst out. "I work for days and you destroy it with a word! You know I can't afford to spend any more time on something that won't sell!"

He flung out of the room. Frances Mary, pricking her upper lip with the needle, sat looking at the door as if her whole being was outside it. She had been taught that it would make matters worse for her to follow. For many minutes she sat listening and waiting.

Wilfred came in again, horribly self-conscious. Marching up to his wife, and tipping her head back, he kissed her lips. She kept her hands squeezed



together, and held her tongue; but could not help her lips from clinging.

“I’m sorry,” said Wilfred with a ridiculous hangdog air. “I’m so damned ill-tempered I’m a burden to myself!” He returned to his chair, keeping his face averted from the light.

Frances Mary’s head was lowered, and tears dropped on the stocking; but her mouth was happily curved.

“You’re right about the story, of course,” said Wilfred doggedly. “It’s hard for me to shake off the romantic stuff that I deal in every day . . . I ought to have a job of some kind. Pegasus becomes spavined in the milkcart. . . .” As he forced himself to speak on, it visibly became less difficult. It was almost cheerfully that he said at last: “I won’t have to rewrite the whole thing of course. I can do it in a day if I get an early start. It will be twice as good.” He drew a long breath, and let it escape again. He reached for his pipe.

When she knew by the sounds that he was intent upon filling it, Frances Mary darted a look across. Her eyes, still wet, were lighted with fun.

After a bit she murmured: “You’re working too hard.”

He shook his head. “It isn’t overwork that makes me irritable. It’s the hundreds of little distractions and interruptions; ordinary business of life. When I’m working, it hurts like needles to be dragged back. So by the time night comes . . .” he finished with a shrug.

“I know,” she said.

“But it’s nothing to worry about,” he went on. “It’s not a disease, but a condition. It’s the inevitable result of our circumstances, and I must just put up with it until they improve, or until the children are old enough for school.”

There was a silence.

“This story ought to have your name on it, Fanny,” he said. “It’s as much yours as mine.”

“Nonsense! I only supplied the critical element.”

“Oh, critical or creative, what’s the diff.? They’re interacting. You have supplied a good half of both.”

“I’m not being self-sacrificing,” she said, snipping the darning cotton. “Some day I’m going to write again. When the children get bigger. In the meantime I don’t want to be a mere tail to your kite. Far better for me to be forgotten awhile, and come back with a bang!”

“What a lot you have given up!” said Wilfred; “. . . for this!” He looked around the family dining-room.

"This room is plenty good enough as long as the children overrun it," said Frances Mary, a little up in arms.

"I spoke metaphorically, my angel," said Wilfred, smiling.

"What! Do you think I would change back with that envious old maid?" said Fanny with a whole smile; "me, a woman married to her man! . . . After I have borne three children!"

"Too many," he said gloomily.

She laughed. "Sure! My fault! . . . It won't hurt me not to write for awhile. My book is lying at the bottom of my heart, soaking."

"It will be far better than anything of mine," he said. "My work has no time to lie in soak."

"Don't be so silly, or you'll make me cry. . . . If a book should come of it, it would be entirely due to you, wouldn't it? You got our children, and kept me while I bore them. That's better than writing three books. . . . Oh, Wilfred!" she cried in a sudden rapture, "the children! Their little shells they got from us, but their souls are their own! I shall never become accustomed to it!"

An obliterating fire blazed up in Wilfred's eyes. From across the table, sly and shining, they sought her eyes compellingly.

She quickly hid her eyes. The corners of her mouth were obstinately turned up "Certainly not!" she said in wifely tones. "After what you just told me! . . . One of us has got to show some sense!"

There was a silence. The dining-room was full of comfort.

"You are the one who has given up things," said Frances Mary. "I have found myself in marriage, and grown fat; while you . . ."

"In seven years his face had become a little greyed; but was still capable of lighting up wonderfully," chanted Wilfred.

"You goose!"

"I needed the halter," said Wilfred. "I was all over the place."

"Look here," she said, "if by some miracle I should write a masterpiece to-morrow, it wouldn't hurt you nearly as much as it would seven years ago, would it?"

"Oh no," he said. "Then I was raw with vanity. The mere blowing of the wind hurt me."

"Well then; it won't be written for another seven years, if ever. By that time you will be more pleased than if you had written it yourself."

"Not quite that," said Wilfred grinning; "still . . ."

She picked up a fresh pair of socks. "You could do a little more on your novel now," she hazarded.

He shook his head.

"We've got nearly three hundred dollars in the bank."

"There's my life insurance next month; and I have to get a little ahead with the next payment on the house."

"I wish we'd never saddled ourselves with this house," she said equably. "We ought to be renters; free to flit."

"I know," said Wilfred; "but it's fine for the children to have a fixed spot to grow in; a rock to fix their little tentacles to—or should it be on?"

"I dunno. . . . Anyhow, there are those two stories you sold in England."

"They only pay on publication. It may be six months before we get the money."

"It's all right if we don't spend it more than once. Borrow until it comes."

He shook his head. "That would only be another worry."

"Wilfred, you don't take chances enough," she said. "Really, you don't. We always get along somehow."

"The children . . ."

"Bread and milk don't cost much. And a dish of soup and greens."

"Shoes do."

"They don't mind patched shoes."

"I do."

"Vanity again!"

"Sure! . . . I'm not satisfied. With this, I mean. We need so many things. It's important that they should have a nice place to grow up in."

Fanny's thoughts veered off. Raising her head, she smiled away in the direction of the window. "Stephen was so funny to-day," she said.

Wilfred took a light from her smile, "How?" he asked eagerly.

"When I lifted him out of the tub this morning he yelled bloody murder as he always does, and I said: 'Oh, for shame!' To my astonishment he stopped in the middle of a yell, and looked at me in such a funny, resentful way. It was the first time I ever reached his consciousness with words."

"Really!" he said, with a look of serious pleasure. "I believe he is going to have a strong individuality."

"Not a doubt of it," she said.

Silence for awhile.

“Well, if you’re going to start right in on the grind again,” said Frances Mary, “you might take a little vacation; a walking-trip.”

Wilfred shook his head. “When I get a little further ahead.”

“That’s what you always say! One of the reasons we came out here was because it was a good walking center; yet I can’t drive you out!”

“Well, I might . . . !” he said, throwing up his head. “For three days. The weather is lovely. . . . And when I come back. . . . Oh, Fan . . . !”

She gave him smile for smile.

“Stanny would be keen about coming,” he went on. “If I dropped him a line to-night, I could spend to-morrow fixing this story; and we could start out together on the following morning.”

Frances Mary said nothing. Her silence changed the feeling of the room; and Wilfred looked across at her, sharply apprehensive. The silence lengthened.

“Oh, Fanny!” he said, “Why do you look like that?”

“I am not looking in any particular way,” she said, darning hard.

“You know you are! . . . Why this feeling against Stanny?”

Frances Mary dropped the sock in her lap. “I can’t help it, Wilfred. He dislikes me so!”

“You’re wrong, I tell you! It is only that he is terrified of you.”

“That’s nonsense.”

“He’s terrified of every respectable woman.”

“I’m not a respectable woman.”

“Then why not show him? You stick it on for fair when he is around.”

“It isn’t Stanny at all,” she said unhappily. “It’s you.”

“Me?”

“You are not open with me. These endless talks that you and Stanny have, that break off so awkwardly when I come in!”

“Just man-talk.”

“Don’t tell me that again! It’s only a pretext. There’s no such thing as man-talk or woman-talk—not with a woman like me!”

“A good deal of it is Stanny’s talk. I’m always trying to give him a more cheerful outlook. I never shall, of course.”

“A good half of it is *your* talk. Your eyes do not light up like that when you are talking to me!”

“Oh, but Fanny . . . ! Why . . . you and I communicate without talking.”

“No! You keep yourself to yourself until Stanny comes! . . . I am always perfectly open with you . . .”

“Indeed, you’re not!” said Wilfred quickly. “There is that whole novel at the bottom of your heart!”

“Well, if I do keep things from you, I don’t save them up for the first stranger!”

“Oh, Fan!”

“No, I won’t be Fanned, and shut up! What I say is true!”

“Of course there’s some truth in it,” said Wilfred slowly; “but how unfair! . . . It’s true that I can let myself go in a certain way with Stanny, that I can’t with you. What of it? Husbands and wives need not swallow each other. There’s nothing serious in it. Unless you make it serious by wrong thinking. You are always for facing things. Face this, and it will go up in smoke. . . . Stanny and I have a certain way of gassing at each other. We’ve always done it. Speculative. Neither takes the other seriously. It’s an enormous relief. Makes you soar for the moment. . . . I cannot talk to you in a speculative vein, because you always have a personal application in mind. You are jealously guarding your own. You refer all my ideas back to our life together. That dries me up. You get your feelings hurt. I have to be studying how not to hurt your feelings. —I don’t mind, dear. To be forced to think of somebody else was my saving. It’s not serious. But you see there *is* such a thing as man-talk. There is woman-talk too.”

“I let my women friends go when I married.”

“You should not have done so. A wife needs reserves . . .”

Frances Mary’s face was tragic. “You are reproaching me now because I . . .”

“Now, Fanny! Isn’t that exactly what I said!”

Her head went down. “Once you said I was disinterested,” she murmured.

“Well, I was wrong. And you knew it at the time! . . . I’m glad I was wrong. Disinterestedness is a good deal like soda crackers.” He reached a hand across the table. “Fanny, old girl . . .”

“Don’t . . . now,” she said sorely.

He couldn’t tell whether she was blaming him now, or herself. “Write to Jessie Dartrey,” he suggested. “She’d come out like a shot.”

“Poor Jessie . . . !” she murmured.

Wilfred breathed with relief. He saw that the corner was turned.

“Wilfred, I can’t help disliking Stanny!” she said with a rush, imploringly.

“It doesn’t matter—if you face it out with yourself.”

Frances Mary started busily to work on her sock again. Her expression assumed to wipe out everything that had been said since she dropped it. “If you don’t write to Stanny at once,” she said to Wilfred rebukingly, “you’ll miss the last collection. . . . And oh! don’t forget to carry your old shoes to the cobbler’s to-morrow. They wont see you through three days’ walking . . .”

### III

WILFRED went to meet the nine-forty from town. The morning had broken gloriously after rain. Oh, the new-washed sky, the glittering trees, and the crystal air! How the group of ugly little buildings which included the station, seemed to plume itself in that sweet clarity—like a gnome dressed in gossamer. That awful ice-cream saloon built two years ago, and already aged, with its cheap cotton awning disfigured by blue lettering stained with the weather; even this was—well, one couldn’t call it lovely, yet he approved it. It belonged. Wilfred’s heart puffed up in his breast like a pop-over in the oven. Too much baking-powder, he thought, grinning at himself.

When Stanny got off the train, Wilfred saw in a glance by the down-drawn corners of his mouth, and his wretched eyes, that he had been having one of his bad times. Lucky I happened to write just then, he thought. Stanny’s friendly greeting was forced.

“Hello, Wilf!”

“Hello, Stanny!”

Behind Stanny, Wilfred caught sight of a taller and younger man, whose good looks arrested him like a blow. A youth out of an antique tale; beautiful, hard, and unselfconscious. Wilfred’s imagination galloped off. To his astonishment, Stanny turned around to allow the young man to come up.

“I brought a fellow along,” Stanny mumbled. “Thought you wouldn’t mind. His name is Taswell.”

“Mind! Of course not!” cried Wilfred, concealing his wonder. “We’re in luck with the weather.”

The young fellow’s face was yellowish; his eyes and his lips cruel with pain. He was mute, or almost so; muttered something in response to

Wilfred's greeting, while his eyes bolted in distaste. He too! thought Wilfred.

Taswell was glancing around at the unfamiliar scene.

"It's a gashly little boro, isn't it?" said Wilfred grinning. "Never mind. Once we climb the hill yonder, we'll leave the paths of progress behind. Come on, you fellows."

"Shouldn't we go to your house first?" asked Stanny, mindful of politeness.

"Nope! Frances Mary doesn't expect us until we come back."

Stanny looked relieved. The two men came along in silence after Wilfred.

Wilfred rattled away. "I thought we'd head first for New City—an amusing village in spite of its name; then north through Pearl River and Nanuet, and back to the Highlands. We can make West Point if you're interested in that sort of thing; but I should say, keep back from the Hudson a mile or so. There are lovely little lakes in there, with forgotten roads from one to another. We'll have to come down into the valley to find a bed . . . But of course if you don't feel like strenuous walking, we can stop anywhere," he added with a glance at his companions.

"You can't walk too far for me," said Taswell, shortly.

"Nor me!" said Stanny.

"Gosh! I needed this!" cried Wilfred, breathing deep. "I had worked myself to a fare-you-well!"

Stanny looked at him with the corners of his mouth drawn down, and Wilfred could read the sarcastic words that were not spoken. Happy Wilf! What Stanny actually said, morosely, was:

"What did Frances Mary think of it?"

"Oh, she got the whole thing up," said Wilfred, glad to score off him.

He perceived of course that his giddy talk was falling on deaf ears; he didn't mind. Subsequently it struck him that there was perhaps something cruel in it. That was the wrong way to deal with the situation. Down-hearted people are enraged by an obvious attempt to cheer them, and rightly so. He became silent. Better to let the sun and the sweet air have way with them.

They plodded along. Rounding the top of the hill, a mile-wide, shallow valley unrolled below them. The sight made Wilfred catch his breath; but he said nothing. It was pasture land, all green except for the dotting farmhouses and villages; an unreal, tender green which did not suggest grass or anything earthly. It was as if one was looking at the land through a magical green

medium. It was like a sea, tenderer than the real sea, and rolling up in one vast gentle swell, sprinkled with white ships. At the far boundaries it faded dreamlike into a grey void.

Wilfred stole frequent glances at his handsome companion. Taswell strode along stiffly, his head up, looking angrily and blindly straight ahead. Wilfred's sense of fitness was gratified by the sight. The noble way to bear pain. What could have dealt him such a blow? Bye and bye a sixth sense informed Wilfred that Stanny resented the keenness of his interest in this new chum. It was an old grievance of Stanny's that Wilfred was too quick to be on with the new. So Wilfred looked directly at Taswell no more; happy enough to be in the company of such a one. Plenty of time! he said to himself. We have three days ahead of us.

They descended into the valley, where the road was carried across a clear stream upon an old stone bridge.

"Half a moment," said Taswell. "I'm thirsty."

Wilfred and Stanny waited by the parapet.

"Look here," said Stanny, jerkily. He refused to meet Wilfred's eye. "Didn't have a chance to tell you before. I've been on the loose again. Suppose you can see it. Three days. Blind. . . . Oh, you needn't say anything!"

"Not going to," said Wilfred.

"This fellow . . ." Stanny went on. "When I came to my senses last night I found myself in a dive up near the Harlem river. He was there, too. In the same boat, you understand. Has had a knockout blow. I don't know what. Won't talk about it. I haven't had any knockout blow. The same thing as usual. Nothingness. . . . My money had given out, and so had his. We were put out of the place together. So we walked all the way down to my place, and I took him in. By that time we were ready to shoot ourselves. I found your letter there, so this morning I borrowed enough from the lunch-room down-stairs to pay our fares up. We haven't a cent."

"I have enough," said Wilfred swiftly. "We can stop at night in farmhouses. I'm damn glad you brought him." He looked over the parapet. "What a splendid young creature, eh, Stanny?"

"I suppose so," said Stanny, dismally refusing to look. "I hadn't thought of it. Hadn't thought of anything at all."

"One could make a friend of him," said Wilfred.

"Oh, you could!" said Stanny, sneering.



Wilfred flung an arm around his old friend's shoulders, and gave him a shake. Stanny looked pettish—a sign that he was on the way to being mollified.

Taswell came springing up the bank. He already felt better, but refused to admit it.

They walked on. Conversation did not flourish as yet; but the two men from town took out their pipes, and that was a hopeful sign. Wilfred was content to bide his time. Stanny had given him much to think about. These two had been down into the depths, yet he profoundly respected them. They were men. They were capable of descending into the depths. He felt like a spore of thistledown alongside them. They were forthright; they were single-minded; they would break before they bent. Whereas he!—he was of a dozen minds, and was continually on the rebound. A knockout blow! Once he had received a knockout blow, and had turned around and made a happy marriage. Oh, he was all right, he thought, smiling ironically at himself, but without bitterness; so things were! He was sure to keep a toehold in society sufficient to obtain in the end a respectable funeral! . . . But what of his two friends? What of Stanny whom he knew so well? He ached with compassion. What could a man do to save his friends? Why nothing, of course. Except to be fond of them. He would have loved to slip an arm through one of theirs on either side; but he suspected they wouldn't like it.

The three friends were sitting in the general room of a miserable village drinking-place which called itself hotel. After all, they had not stopped at a farmhouse, because, as Wilfred knew, in a friendly farmhouse one must pay for one's entertainment with sociability; and Stanny and Taswell were short of this coin at present. They had secured a double room in this poor place for a dollar. They were the only lodgers.

They were seated at a bare table with glasses of beer before them. From the bar adjoining came the sounds of loud, empty voices; but they were alone. It was a dreary room; ugly to start with, and worth nobody's while to keep tidy and clean. There was the usual little desk with a worn book, which had served as a register for many years, and was not yet full; a rusty cigar-lighter; and a glass inkwell, caked with dried spillings. There was another table covered with opened newspapers; and wooden chairs standing about; "hotel" chairs with round backs. On the soiled walls hung an old railway map and a garish calendar.

Things were going well with the three friends. The springs of talk had been released. Young Taswell's face was red from walking all day in the

open; and Stanny had recovered his usual air of mournful dignity. They were talking about Life and so forth in a disconnected way, each bent on expressing himself without much regard for the others.

“The world is shared by the two lots,” Wilfred was saying dreamily “lords and slaves. The queerest thing about the situation is that the slaves are as well pleased with their places as the Lords are with theirs. They will fight for the privilege of remaining slaves! All the trouble is made by a third lot, much smaller; I mean the men who wish to be free themselves, and have no particular desire to lord it over anybody. The other two lots join in hating them of course, for different reasons; and never miss a chance of trying to step on them. And of course they generally succeed, since they own the earth between them. That is why the rarest spirits, the men with a bit of Michael or Lucifer in them (those two are so much alike!) so often end as police court bums or beachcombers.”

“You seem quite cheerful about this rotten state of affairs,” remarked Stanny.

“Oh, the act of talking cheers you,” said Wilfred, grinning. “Thank God! we can still talk about it!”

“You’re a good fellow,” said Taswell, a little condescendingly, “but of course that’s all nonsense. The best men are bound to come to the top!”

“Oh, well, so long as I’m a good fellow . . . !” said Wilfred, laughing.

“You talk all over the place,” objected Taswell. “You don’t follow through. Talking just for the sake of talking; that’s nothing. You must hold fast to certain ideas.”

“Those fixed ideas are the rocks in the rapids on which we shatter ourselves,” said Wilfred.

“What have we got to hang on to, then?” demanded Taswell.

“Nothing! We must let life carry us.”

“Oh, look here . . . ! Nobody knows of course what the end is going to be; but I’ve got to know what I’m doing on the way!”

“I just enjoy the motion,” said Wilfred, smiling.

“You don’t really mean anything you say!” said Taswell, impatiently.

“That’s true, in a sense,” said Wilfred. “But there’s a sort of general meaning to be collected out of the whole.”

“That’s too misty for me!”

Stanny suddenly sprang to Wilfred’s defense. It was one of his most endearing qualities that he would never allow anybody else to abuse Wilfred the way he did himself. “Wilfred is perfectly consistent,” he insisted. “You’ll

see that when you know him better. He has constructed a sort of scheme for himself, out of movement, change, balance; give and take; forward and back; and so on. He's a philosophic chameleon."

They all laughed.

"Just the same," grumbled Taswell, "it destroys everything to say that the best men go to the bottom!"

"Your best need not be my best," said Wilfred.

Taswell stared at him in exasperation.

"I like that figure about the rapids," said Stanny, off on a tack of his own. "That's what life is, a rapids. And you have no boat. You are up to your knees in it; or your waist; or your neck; just as your luck may be. With the current tearing at you without a letup. And no shores to climb out on. Steep walls of rock on either side. All you can do is to lean against the current, and drag your feet up, one step at a time."

Wilfred experienced an actual physical pain that made him grit his teeth. "That's all damn nonsense!" he said, exasperated with compassion. "The rock of a fixed idea that you've been knocking your head against through life! Why insist on it, and make yourself wretched? It is equally as true to say that one may sail downstream with life. The purest pleasure I ever experienced was in shooting rapids in a small boat. I didn't know what was around the bend, either!"

"Oh well, it's all talk!" said Stanny, smiling and unconvinced.

Wilfred looked at him, biting his lip. Often one longed to beat the wrong-headed, unhappy Stanny.

Taswell's mind was still worrying over the original proposition. Taswell was at a disadvantage, because in his person at this moment he was offering a sad commentary on the optimistic philosophy that he cherished. While he scorned Wilfred's ideas, he was strongly drawn to them. "According to you," he said to Wilfred, "everything in the world is wrong and rotten!"

"Not everything," said Wilfred. "Only certain human institutions."

"The Joe Kaplans," suggested Stanny.

Taswell, suddenly roused, brought down the soft side of his fist on the table. "Oh, *damn* him!" he said thickly.

"Hear! Hear!" said Stanny and Wilfred. "You, too?"

But Taswell's eyes bolted. He pressed his lips together.

"What brought Kaplan into your mind just then?" asked Wilfred of Stanny.

“He’s just added ‘Truth’ to his string of newspapers and magazines,” said Stanny. “He’s put in a stinker as art editor. I had a row with him. I can see that I am booked to go down where it’s steep.”

They were silent for awhile.

“What *is* right in the world?” asked Taswell at length.

Wilfred, feeling shamefaced before this hard-eyed young stranger, grinned and said: “Well, love.”

Taswell’s eyes bolted again. They all felt inclined to blush.

“Now he’s off on his favorite rocking-horse,” said Stanny.

Laughter relieved the strain.

Taswell’s laughter was brief. “Well, if you ask me,” he said harshly, “love leads you into the blackest hole of them all!”

Neither of the other two looked at him.

“I don’t mean the love of women,” said Wilfred, diffidently.

“He means general love,” said Stanny. “I know all this by heart.”

“I never could get that idea,” said Taswell. “Sounds weak . . . scattered to me. I can’t love everybody. I don’t want to.”

“Well, say understanding,” amended Wilfred. “If I had been Christ I would have put it: ‘Know ye one another!’”

“According to your notions, do women fare any better in life?” Taswell demanded abruptly.

“Women or men,” said Wilfred; “we’re all in the same boat. The most glorious ones are apt to go under.”

Taswell was evidently lying in wait for this answer. “I deny that!” he said quickly. “I knew a glorious woman: the real thing; like . . . like . . . well, the real thing! She made a mess of her life—so far you’re right; but she didn’t go under. She picked up what there was left, and went on more glorious than ever!”

“I knew a woman like that,” said Wilfred softly; “like a flag in the wind . . . !”

“Yes . . . yes!” murmured Taswell. “That’s fine . . . !”

“And she made a mess of her life, too. What has happened to her I don’t know. She must have gone under in the best sense, I think, though the semblance of her is still flying.”

“I’ve never known any woman,” said Stanny, with the silly-sounding laugh under which men mask their most painful emotions; “except for an hour or two.”

The talk rambled on. They never agreed upon anything; nevertheless they were drawn together.

#### IV

INTO a brilliantly lighted, well-filled saloon on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Thirty-fourth street, strolled Joe Kaplan. He was wearing an overcoat of English tweed; a white Angora muffler around his neck; and a fashionable soft hat. Evening dress was suggested beneath. Accustomed to being stared at, his expression was bland; but could not altogether conceal the quality of electric alertness which attracted people's eyes, without their knowing why. Making his way to the bar, he ordered a drink of whiskey. He looked at nobody, but was visibly holding himself in readiness to be hailed. Like a royal prince, he had to be prepared for encounters in the unlikeliest places. He cultivated the note of bonhomie in public, which encouraged hails. This was sometimes inconvenient; but Joe argued that it was better to be hailed than to be watched unknown to yourself.

He was not hailed. Leaning his elbows on the mahogany rail, and embracing the little whiskey glass within one hand, preparatory to kissing it, he gazed with pleasure at his reflection in the mirror behind the bar. A thoughtless pleasure, and cumulative; for it made him exult the more, to see himself exulting. Likeness of a fellow with a dandy appetite! The fine creases on either side of his mouth deepened. He observed that the snowy muffler set off his pink skin and jetty black hair with striking effectiveness.

Swallowing his whiskey, he went out again, and turned west in Thirty-fourth street. This neighborhood had lately taken on a nondescript character. The building of the Pennsylvania terminal had brought business among the sedate old dwelling-houses, and some of them were now let out in rooms to all comers. The landlords collected their rents in advance, and shrugged their shoulders: the tenants looked after themselves. Joe had considered all this before hiring a room there.

With a final glance around, to assure himself he had not been recognized, Joe turned into one of the old houses, and mounting to a hall room on an upper floor, let himself in. It had been a family bedroom once; the old-fashioned wall-paper was rubbed and discolored; the grate was full of litter; the floor smelled of dust. There was nothing in the room now but some old clothes hanging from a row of hooks on the back of the door, and a new kitchen chair. Without troubling to make a light, Joe, whistling between his teeth, commenced to take off his fine clothes replacing them with the shabby garments from the back of the door. The chair was to enable him to

change his shoes in comfort. He spread a newspaper to protect his stockinged feet from the dusty floor.

In due course he issued out of the house, metamorphosed. He was now wearing a greasy mackintosh with the collar turned up around his neck, and a shapeless cap pulled down over his eyes. He had sloughed off more than the fine clothes; somehow he looked ten years younger, and fifteen pounds lighter. His glance seemed to have become narrower and more penetrating, his nose longer, his cheeks hollower, his mouth more cruel. His gait had become a loose-limbed slouch, full of a latent spring. He gave the effect of a young wolf at his ease, with his tongue lolling. He padded noiselessly along the pavement at an uneven rate, like an idle wolf; sometimes a lighted shop window drew him to stand and gaze with vacant, brilliant eyes.

In another saloon he bought a bottle of whiskey, and carried it away under the mackintosh. At Herald Square he hailed a taxicab, and had himself driven down-town to the corner of Rivington street and the Bowery. He walked east in Rivington street, his steps unconsciously quickening, and becoming purposeful. He loitered no more. Turning into one of the older tenement houses, the springs in his body seemed suddenly to be released. Running up the stairs two at a time, he rapped at a door on the first landing.

There was no answer; and with a black face, he rapped again.

From within, a woman's voice answered coolly: "You can't come in."

Joe looked like a balked wolf then. "It's me," he muttered.

"I can't help it. You'll have to come back in ten minutes."

He slunk back and forth before the door, showing his teeth, and impotently glaring at the panels. Then he went noisily down the stairs. Outside, he kept shifting uneasily around the low stoop with his wolflike tread, keeping his glance fixed on the entrance with a snarl fixed in his face; yet half afraid; for suddenly he veered off across the roadway, with his head over his shoulder. He entered a lunch-room opposite, and ordering a cup of coffee, brought it back to the window where he could still watch the entrance to the tenement house. Presently a man came out. Joe had never seen the man, but by his furtive air he knew it was the man he was waiting for. Joe, drawing behind the window frame, watched him, snarling, and profoundly indifferent. Leaving the coffee, he went back across the street.

In the comfortable, clean, ugly room, with a double bed across the front, and a gas-cooker, sink and icebox at the back, Jewel was waiting for him, wrapped in a pink, quilted silk coat, which was beginning to reveal its cotton stuffing. She stood motionless in the center of the floor, dusky, solid,

significantly shapeless, like a piece of sculpture beginning to emerge from the stone.

“What the hell . . . !” began Joe angrily. “A nice thing . . . !”

“Aah!” she said, moving slightly. “You don’t own me!”

“You don’t have to have them now!” he cried.

“Sure, I don’t have to have them. But I *can* have them, if I want.”

Joe, cursing, flung his mackintosh on the sofa. Like a wolf, he snarled obliquely.

“If you’d let me know when you were coming . . .” she suggested.

“Aah!” he snarled. “That would spoil it. I like to come on the impulse. . . . And you like me to.”

“Sure, I do,” she said with a slow smile. “But you can’t blame me, if you find me engaged.”

“Damnation!” cried Joe, flinging back and forth across the room with his soft tread. “Oh, damnation! I might as well go, now!”

Jewel shrugged. She moved portentously to the foot of the bed, where she could look out of the second window. She knew quite well he had no intention of going. Looking out of the window, she waited calmly for him to work off the burden of his ill-temper.

“I don’t see why you wont let me hire you a decent place up-town,” he cried.

“Yer on’y tahkin’,” she said. “You ought to know by this time I’ll never take anything off you. Why, you fool, it’s on’y because you got no strings on me that you’re still wild about coming here!”

“How about you?”

She gave him her slow creased smile over a shoulder. “Well, if I ever git enough of you, I’ll let you give me a hundred thousand.”

“But this room!” he grumbled. “On the level . . . !”

“Suits me!” she said. “I wouldn’t change it for the Waldorf Astoria. I fixed my bed so’s I could lie in it all day if I wanted, and look into the street.”

“That’s why you’re so fat,” said Joe. “Gee! you’re fat!”

“Well, they tell me you can’t get too much of a good thing,” she said good-humoredly.

Joe dropped on the sofa, all of a piece. His legs and arms jerked restlessly. There was no guard on his sharp face, and the successive emotions flickered there, and gave place to each other, as inconsistently as in

the face of a wild being. He looked at her savagely and cravenly. He snarled; and his whole face became suffused with a dark delight.

“You——!” said Joe thickly. “I’ll pay you out for this!”

Jewel turned around. Her broad face creased into wrinkles. She laughed richly in her throat.

“You come here!” said Joe.

“You come here!” she said coolly. “You don’t own me!”

“I’ll show you!”

She awaited him massively. He did not go to her in a straight line, but veered; and his shoulders writhed. His darting eyes could not meet her steady, laughing ones. His eyes were perfectly irresponsible. Deep, fixed lines of pain and bliss were etched about his grinning lips.

“By God! One of these days I’ll kill you!” he muttered, enraptured.

She laughed from her capacious breast. “You talk so big!”

Raising himself on his elbow, Joe felt around on the bed for the cigarettes. “Just the same,” he said in an aggrieved voice, “I don’t see why you’ve got to have anybody but me.”

“Yeah,” she said, “sit here twiddling my thumbs, eh? till you happen to feel like coming round.”

“I haven’t got anybody but you.”

“So *you* say. How do I know whether you have or not? It’s nothing to me either way. . . . You’ve got a wife.”

“Aah! I don’t trouble her no more. It’s better that way. As long as I did, we used to scrap. . . . She never meant anything in particular to me. Too high-toned.”

“You got plenty other interests,” said Jewel. “Men are my amusement. They come here, and talk about their wives. I listen, and thank my God I’m no man’s wife. I’m a luxury to them, see? And you bet they have to mind themselves around me.”

“Just the same . . .” grumbled Joe.

“What’s the matter with you? You never bothered about it before. Only to-night you happened to. . . .”

“Who was he?”

“I shan’t tell you. He don’t cut no ice, anyhow.”

“Well, I admit I don’t like to have my bed warmed for me.”



“Find another bed, then. There’s no use grouching about it, and you know it. I mean to live as I please.”

“Aah!” he grumbled, “a person would think it was nothing at all to have Joe Kaplan in your bed.”

“Aah!” she retorted, “your money’s no good to you *there!*”

She chuckled at her own joke, and the bed shook. Joe, laughing too, tumbled her roughly.

“Your wife must be a funny one,” she said presently.

“She’s all right!” said Joe, carelessly. “I did a damn good day’s work when I copped her. Year by year she gets handsomer. There ain’t a woman in New York can wear diamonds like her. She gives my house the style of a King’s palace.”

“But never to quarrel with you?”

“She’s too proud to quarrel with me. She’d go a hundred miles out of her way to avoid a quarrel. Suits me all right. I don’t want to be bothered around the house. It’s the same about other men. Too proud to look at them. It’s a cinch for me.”

“Well, pride is a cold bedfellow,” said Jewel. “I’m glad I’m not her.”

“God! your breast is so broad and firm!” murmured Joe, pillowing his head there.

“You’re my kid,” she murmured, running her fingers through his thick hair. “For me, you have never got any bigger.”

“On’y a kid?” demanded Joe, raising his head, and grinning close in her face.

“Oh well, a man, too. Crazy about yourself, ain’t yeh?”

“When I come here,” he said, dropping back on the pillow, “a weight rolls off me, sort of. I can let myself go. I been with lots of women, but it wasn’t the same. I was always tryin’ to make them crazy about me. With you, you old slob! I don’t think of nothing. What ud be the use? You know me!”

Rolling over, he flung his arms around her body. “You’re so damn solid, so damn solid!” he muttered. “Gee! it’s great. I don’t know why. You’re so slow and hard to change. It’s funny, but whatever you say seems to come right out of the middle of you. You’re never any different, only more so. Like a tree, damn you! Rooted in the same spot!”

He sat up on the bed, nursing his knees. “Well, here’s me, if you know what I mean. Look at the way I’ve worked and schemed, and gone up like a skyrocket. It’s been a hell of a lot of fun, but it don’t seem quite real. All

sparks, like the tail of the rocket. It's been too easy, maybe. Men are such simp. I never had no setbacks to speak of. All I was concerned with was keepin' out of jail. The same with women. They fell for me so easy, there was no zip to it. I've cut out women. . . .

"Here I am at the top, and I don't find it no different. At heart I'm the same kid that used to swipe apples offen t' pushcarts out there. Gee! I never found a street I liked as well as Rivington. . . . In them days I thought it would be different to be rich. A kind of dream, like. But everything stays just the same. Not but what I enjoy all the big stuff at that; conferring with prominent men, and making them do what I want; being God to thousands of little men; and living in a God-damn palace and all. But not so much as I did. I'm used to it now. And there's always that feeling somehow that it ain't quite real. I've got a child, and I swear I can't feel that he's mine at all. . . . Funny! . . .

"When I was a kid, once in a while I'd wake up in my bed all in a sweat. I don't know . . . I can't exactly name it. A sort of where-am-I feeling, and not a damn thing to grab hold of. God! for a minute, it makes you fair sick at your stomach. Well . . . that's what I mean. Up there on the Avenue in my fancy bed—it was Louis the something or other's bed, or one of those guys; I swear I have the same dream every once in a while, and wake up sweating just the same old way. So what have I got out of it all? Me, myself, inside, I'm just the same. I've got you; but I had you when I was a kid, and hadn't nothing else. . . .

"It's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. I don't mean to be complaining. I've had a hell of a good time, and still do. I have everything a man could have. I travel light. I don't worry about nothing. It's wonderful what a lot of things I don't worry about! They call me heartless. Well, ——— them! A pack of coyotes. They used to yelp at me in their newspapers. Well, I bought their newspapers. I'm one of the most powerful men in New York they say. I suppose I am. But . . . somehow it don't seem quite real . . . !"

He dropped down, and put his hands around her thick throat. "Only this . . . ! By God! this is real . . . !"

"I thought you was gonna takk all night," murmured Jewel sleepily. "Such foolishness . . . !"

Joe chuckled.

ILFRED and Frances Mary were having tea at the Plaza. One of the children had been sick, and a temporary nurse had been had in for the others. The sick child was better, and this was the nurse's last day. Hence the jaunt to town. After all, tea is not an expensive meal. They had come early in order to secure one of the coveted tables beside the tall East windows, and had made the meager provender last out. The great room was now full.

Wilfred affected to despise this kind of a show; but what a bursting-forth it provided in Fanny's restricted life. Her shabby coat was thrown back over the chair, revealing her in a pretty new dress she had had no opportunity to wear before. Her hat was becoming. Blue was Fanny's color. A hint of pink warmed her dusky cheeks, and the tired eyes were beaming. For himself, Wilfred had succeeded in putting the unpaid bills out of mind. The child was better! It was a good moment; he swam in it.

"Look at that extraordinary little fat man with the party of girls," said Frances Mary. "He could play the Earl of Loam in Barrie's comedy."

"But the Earl of Loam was a respectable husband and father," said Wilfred.

"I was just thinking of his legs. They must be the same thickness all the way down like chimney pots."

"I should say he'd do better as Silenus."

"Is it possible that a man so old can still enjoy that sort of thing?" she speculated, looking at the girls.

"I don't know. He has to make believe to. With a face like that he wouldn't be accepted in any other part."

"Ah! what fun it is to watch people!" she murmured.

Wilfred smiled at her with quick warmth. But the suggestion of gratitude in his smile troubled Frances Mary. The roomful ceased to interest her. "You are thinking," she said, crumbling a bit of cake, "that it is the only thing we can really share."

Wilfred's expanding petals were slightly frost-bitten. Why would she insist on dragging his secret thoughts out into the light? He hid the damage as well as he could. "Not the only thing," he said. "And anyhow, it's a lot!"

She remained pensive. "We tease each other so!" she murmured.

"What of it?" he said; "do we not also. . . ."

"Oh, don't start on compensation," she said. "I must have my absolutes!"

“You’re a little mixed,” said Wilfred. . . . “You’re welcome to them. . . . Look here, people with such sensitive feelers as we have are bound to find marriage full of little wounds. I think we do pretty well, considering. The only settled grievance I have against you is that you worry every little difficulty like a cat with a mouse. The mice are not important.” Thrusting his feet out, he embraced hers between them unseen. This he knew was more potent with Frances Mary than yards of argument. “Can you imagine us not married to each other? Or childless?”

She looked at him deeply and shook her head.

“Well, then, what the hell . . . !”

She sighed with appeasement; and her glance returned to embrace the room at large. “What a glittering spectacle!”

“Im-hym,” said Wilfred. “Glittering’s the word. Slightly unreal. Because they’re all on parade. How wonderful if one could see a crowd of people really letting themselves out.”

“But where could one see such a thing?”

“I don’t know. . . . Once I saw a festa in an Italian street here. Little side street up-town. They had arches thrown across the roadway, decorated with colored lamps. And all the people’s faces wore a look of escape. They were swarming in and out of their church. . . .”

“Look, Wilfred, here’s a distinguished-looking pair coming in.”

Wilfred turned around in his chair—and very quickly straightened again. Confusion came striding into his contented mind, swinging a scythe. “Lord!” he said in an uncertain voice, “it’s Joe Kaplan and his wife. I hope to God they don’t see us!”

She glanced at him sharply. “They’re coming this way,” she remarked.

Wilfred looked down. “My back is toward them. They don’t know you.”

“So that is what she’s like!” murmured Fanny.

“Fortunately there is no vacant table near us,” muttered Wilfred.

As he heard steps come abreast of the table, he looked out of the window. It was a harrowing moment. The steps ceased; recommenced; stopped again. Then Elaine’s clear voice:

“Wilfred! I knew the back of your head!”

From across the table Wilfred could feel Frances Mary congeal. He looked up with too much of a start, and rose. His face felt as if it were turning red and green. He despairingly hoped that with the passage of the years he had acquired a modicum of inscrutability. The sight of her took his breath away. She had blossomed in splendor. Most beautifully dressed, of

course, but that was not it; the spirit of the woman shone out of her array. Queenly. There was not a woman in the room who could approach her. And an entirely good-humored queen! According to Wilfred's calculations, her eyes at least ought to have betrayed wretchedness; but they were serenely clear. His whole scheme of things tottered; he felt like a clown.

"Hello!" he cried with a false heartiness. "What a fortunate accident! . . . This is my wife . . . Mrs. Kaplan."

"How do you do?" said Elaine, putting out her hand, and looking at Frances Mary with frank and friendly curiosity. She was likewise saying to herself: So this is what you're like!

Wilfred and Joe shook hands, and Joe was duly presented to Frances Mary. Wilfred was even more astonished at Joe's appearance. Young, slim, clear-skinned, at the highest point in the arc of manhood's vigor; where were the marks of an evil nature, of evil living, that ought to have shown before now? Standing close to him, Wilfred observed the peachy quality of Joe's skin, verging into a cool grey upon his miraculously shaven chin. In seven years Joe's face had grown in composure; the habit of authority had given it a high look. One of the leaders of men! Wilfred thought with twisted bitterness. Well . . . one must face it! He felt reluctantly drawn to Joe. For the thousandth time he wished he were not so at the mercy of physical beauty. But presently the bitterness passed with the thrilling thought: What regions there are in man still to explore!

"You still live in New York?" Elaine said to Wilfred. "How is it we never see you?"

"Well, we hardly move in the same circles," said Wilfred smiling, and immediately sensible that he could scarcely have said a worse thing.

"This is too good a chance to be lost," said Elaine, looking around for a chair. "May we sit down with you for a minute?"

"By all means," said Wilfred, signalling to a waiter. Inwardly he cursed the situation. Frances Mary was smiling like plate glass. It will take me hours, days perhaps, to bring her round, he thought despairingly.

No more did Joe welcome the situation. "My dear," he said, "the Beekmans have seen us. They are signalling."

How strangely that "My dear!" rang through the corridors of Wilfred's consciousness! He thought of the seven years of intimacy between these two. Face to face, stripped of all disguise—but *had* they ever revealed their souls to each other? One would never know!

Waiters had pushed up two chairs, and Elaine seated herself. She said to Joe: "Go over and explain to them that we have unexpectedly met some old

friends. We'll be with them in five minutes."

Joe marched off, rubbing his upper lip.

The eyes of everybody in the vicinity were addressed to their table, which was rather cruel on Frances Mary and Wilfred in their undistinguished attire. Elaine, of course, was oblivious. She addressed herself to Frances Mary.

"My husband and yours have been acquainted for many years."

"Yes, Wilfred has spoken of it," said Frances Mary.

In this opening, Elaine betrayed herself to be not so candid as she appeared. She had apprehended Frances Mary's antagonism, and the latter had instantly perceived it. There was nothing gauche about Frances Mary, only the glassiness of her eyes warned Wilfred of jarring voices within. He was painfully aware of the worn lining of his wife's coat over the back of the chair. Joe would mark that when he came back. Why had he ever brought her here? They did not belong to it. Wilfred's sympathies were all on the side of Fanny—well, his main sympathies, the outside part of him; the sprite was for Elaine, because Fanny had intrenched herself, whereas Elaine was skirmishing pluckily in the open.

Elaine was momentarily at a loss. It must have occurred to her to wonder why she had insisted on sitting down. Like most impulses, it would not bear a critical examination. Wilfred's heart went out to her; it had been a generous impulse. It was not often that she troubled to come out of her shell like this. It was Fanny who played the grudging part. Well, there Elaine was. She tried again.

"You have several children, haven't you? Somebody told me."

"Three," said Frances Mary. "Two girls and a boy."

"I envy you," said Elaine. "I have only one little boy. So bad for a child not to have any brothers and sisters."

"Yes," said Frances Mary politely. She looked down in her plate. The question was between them, large, unspoken: Well, why don't you give him some?

Elaine turned to Wilfred. "How does the writing go?" she asked in her whole-hearted way.

Wilfred, thinking of Frances Mary, shivered for the speaker. What a false note to issue from the ringing Elaine! Once she stepped out of her charmed circle, she was but mortal clay. It endeared her to him.

"No better nor worse than usual," he said, smiling unhappily. What *could* one answer to such a question?

"I haven't come across your name lately," said Elaine, meaning well.

This remark made the silent Fanny savage. Wilfred made haste to answer, lightly: "You wouldn't. There are so many underground ways of making one's living by the pen."

From his wife's somber glance he gathered that this had not helped him with *her*. Oh dear! Oh dear! he thought; why must everybody have so many corns to get trodden on!

Joe returned with a bland, blank face. He did not give a hang about them, Wilfred saw; indeed, he had probably recalled Wilfred to mind only with difficulty. But his politeness was perfect. It was Joe who saved the face of the situation.

"Beekman tells me there's a report going the rounds that the suffragettes tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament, and that the news was suppressed."

Wilfred was grateful. He had to confess to himself that polite people have their uses.

"Good Heavens!" said Frances Mary. "Do you suppose it's true?"

Joe shrugged. "It amuses people to pass these stories round."

"Well, I hope they did!" said Frances Mary.

Wilfred stared. Could this be his Fanny?

Joe smiled deprecatingly. "I approve of their cause, but hardly of their methods," he said.

"Perhaps they are the only effective methods," said Frances Mary.

"Oh, Englishmen could not possibly give in to intimidation," said Joe.

"We shall see," said Frances Mary, smiling back.

Elaine had scarcely listened to this. She was bent like a child on making friends. She said to Joe: "Mr. Pell is a writer, you remember."

"Ah," said Joe. "I had forgotten. . . . What is your line, Pell?"

"Fiction," said Wilfred. It struck him that there was something deliciously appropriate in the word. It was his little private joke. No other eye betrayed any consciousness of it.

"I control several fiction magazines," said Joe, with his deprecatory air. "You must submit your stories to my editors."

Frances Mary was on the verge of an ironic speech here, but Wilfred managed to divert it with a warning touch of his foot under the table. "Thanks, I will," he said pleasantly to Joe.

"What are the children's names?" Elaine asked of Frances Mary.

“Mary, Constance, and Stephen.”

“I like those names. Mary, I suppose, is . . .”

“Six.”

“The same age as my Sturges. . . . I wish you’d come to see me some day, Mrs. Pell. And bring Mary. I mean it. Shall I write and set a day?”

“Oh, thanks,” said Frances Mary, with a sky-like candor; “I should like to come ever so much; but I’m afraid it will be impossible. We live in Rockland County, you see; and I have no nurse. My days in town are few and far between.”

Wilfred gritted his teeth. Ah well, one had to endure these things. Frances Mary’s spirit was admirable; but why need she have rebuffed the generous Elaine?

“I could send a car out to get you,” suggested Elaine.

“You are too kind! I have made it a rule never to go visiting with the children while they are small.”

Upon that Wilfred saw that Elaine gave up. “I’m so sorry!” she said, resuming her usual unconcerned surface. Meanwhile Joe, out of politeness, was telling Wilfred the latest news of the government’s Philippine policy, in which Wilfred was not the least interested.

Presently Elaine arose. “We must be getting on to our friends. So glad to have run into you. Good-bye. . . . Good-bye, Wilfred.”

She went with a frank, final smile at him, that was hard to bear. If she had gone without looking at him, he could have built on that. Her whole attitude had been rather devastating to a man’s vanity. He could hardly tell himself that she had lived to regret her refusal of him. Seeing his wife there in her two-seasons-old coat, and hearing about the three children and no help! Then Wilfred grinned inwardly at his own expense. Incurable! Still prone to strut, drawing the rags of his egotism about him!

His eyes followed Elaine. He saw her whisper to Joe, and could read her lips. “What a tiresome woman!” And Joe’s courteous acquiescence. . . . Even though Elaine and Joe might be perfectly indifferent to each other, what a beautiful picture their life made! Eighteenth century beauty. Maybe there was a sort of peace in a loveless marriage. Was love really worth all the wear and tear that it entailed? . . . By way of contrast, he and Fanny returning to their jerry-built house, and their niggling domestic cares . . . ! But no bitterness! The child was better! . . . And anyhow, he could more fully apprehend the beauty of an elegant life than its possessors. So was it not really his more than theirs? An inexpensive and a comforting doctrine . . . ! One’s own life, too. Sometimes you were able to survey it from a slight



elevation. A bit of meaning emerged from the welter. Oh yes, you gained something on the distracting pilgrimage, though you might not realize it at the time. Bitterness was gone. He could be thrilled by Elaine's splendid air, without experiencing the sting of desire. . . . He must store away this last sight of her. How well he knew the gallant carriage of her flat back, and the little half curls at the nape of her neck! He had recovered her. She was glorious again! . . .

He sat down facing the cold reality of Frances Mary. He debated how best to deal with her; and while he was considering it, heard the mild words coming out of his own mouth: "Why do you act so? She is nothing to me!"

"Your eyes are full of her!" said Frances Mary, darkly.

Wilfred sighed, and made a feeble gesture.

"She was trying to make us feel cheap!" said Frances Mary.

"You are quite wrong," he said quickly. "Not until the very end, and you forced that on her."

"You understand her of course," she said.

Wilfred experienced a sort of collapse. Of what use this endless struggle? No advance was possible. And how tired he was! Was it *his* fault? Why did the onus invariably fall upon him? Oh, to be alone and at peace, away from the pulling of all these hands, big and little! To be at sea with men for his shipmates . . . !

"Let's go," said Frances Mary, bleakly. "We have just time to catch the 5:23."

Wilfred roused himself automatically. "No hurry," he said. "We're not going on the 5:23. . . . It would be too ridiculous to let this accident spoil our day; to lie down under it! Just for that, we're going to make a night of it now. We're going to walk down the avenue, looking in all the shop windows. We're going to Mouquin's to dinner, and afterwards to a play. We can send a telegram to nurse. . . ."

Frances Mary shook her head. "It would be silly to spend the money. I shouldn't enjoy it now. Come on. . . ."

"You've damned well *got* to enjoy it!" said Wilfred. "We're not going home with our tails between our legs. . . ."

"The thought of those people. . . ."

"Forget them . . . ! If I can only find a play with some good laughs in it. . . ."

She picked up her gloves. "You stay. I'd rather go home, really."

“Well, go ahead!” said Wilfred recklessly. “And by God! I’ll get drunk! Sometimes it’s the only rejoinder . . . !”

Frances Mary laid down her gloves.

They were walking down the avenue. Apropos of nothing, Frances Mary said: “Anyways, the man was impossible! Such insolence!”

A great rush of gratitude filled Wilfred’s breast. She was coming ’round! Cheers! He cunningly hid his joy. He did not honestly think that Joe had been insolent, but one could concede that! “I always told you what he was.”

“The cheek of his pretending that he had never heard of you, when you’re a regular contributor to one of his rotten magazines!”

“It’s quite on the cards that he may never read his magazines,” said Wilfred. “Indeed, I hope it may be true that I am unknown to him. That’s why I kicked you under the table.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Suppose this meeting irritated him,” said Wilfred. “Mind you, I don’t think he noticed us one way or t’other; but if it was called to his attention that he had the power to injure me, he might write to his editor telling him to step on my stuff hereafter. That’s the worst of power: a man can’t always resist the temptation of making it felt, even if there’s nothing in particular to be gained.”

“Oh, Wilfred . . . !”

“He and his like are our masters,” said Wilfred serenely, “and it behooves us to step warily in their presence.”

“How can you be so calm about it?”

“Well,” said Wilfred, grinning sideways at her, “I have, to use that word which you despise, compensations!”

Fanny suddenly slipped her arm through his.

“Oh, Wilfred . . .” she faltered. “You’re such a dear . . . ! I’m sorry . . . ! I believe I’m going to cry. . . . Now, I’m sure I am! I can’t keep it back . . . !”

“That’s all right! We’ll turn down this side street. Let her fly, old girl! . . .”

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 *Antennae* by Hulbert Footner]