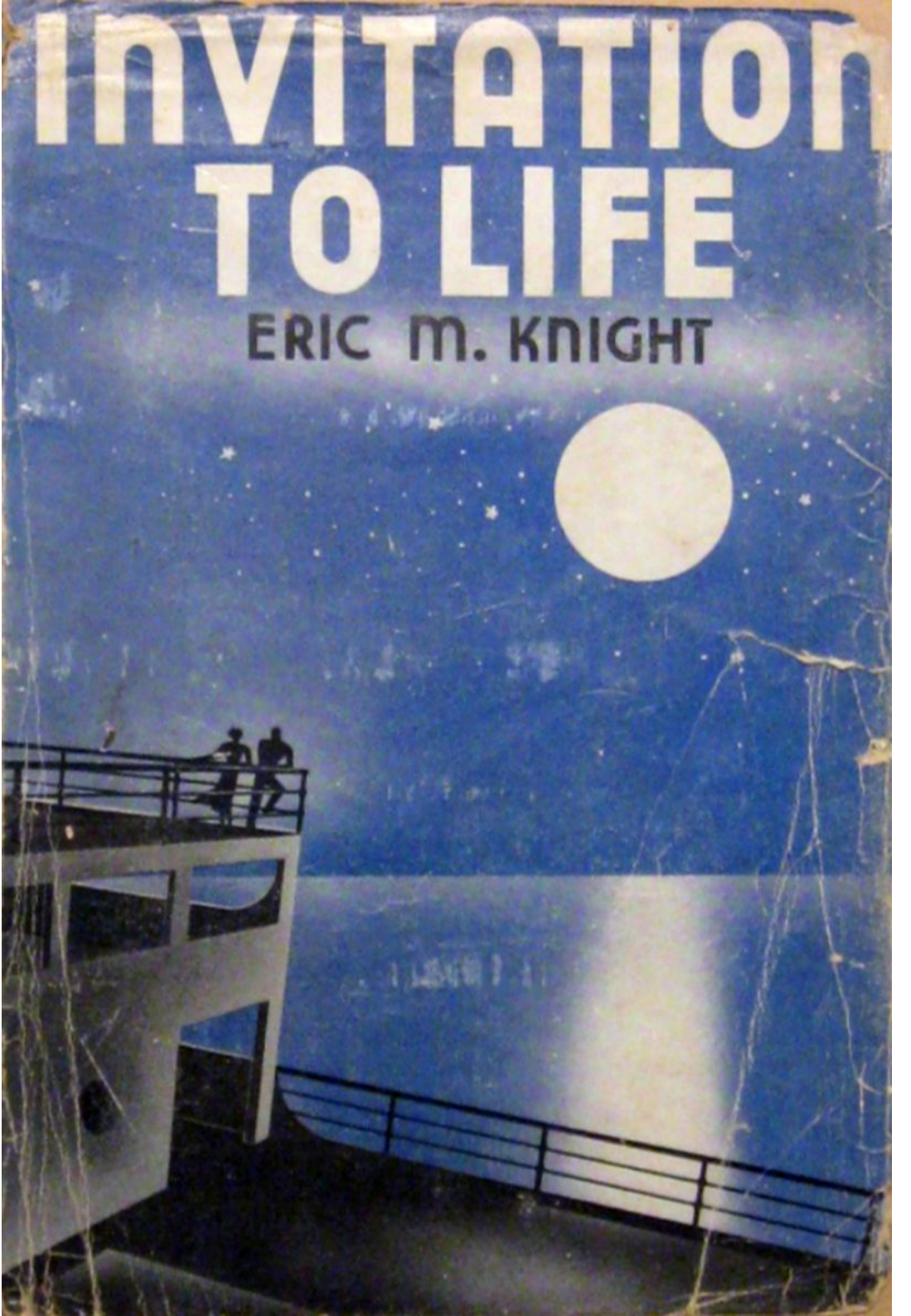
INVITATION TO LIFE

ERIC M. KNIGHT



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Invitation to Life

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ERIC KNIGHT

Author of
This Above All

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TO

WINIFRED HILDA

who knows nothing about it

AUTHOR'S NOTE

All the characters in this book
are purely fictitious

PART ONE

"*In notes by distance made more sweet.*"

—COLLINS.

1

WOMEN were wondering how large leg o' mutton sleeves could be (and still remain not too ultra) and with great newspaper publicity Grant's Tomb was dedicated on Riverside Drive, New York.

With headlong haste humans moved in the direction of the Klondike, where, it was said, gold could be found; people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of the one hundred and fifty French socialites, mostly women, who had been burned to death while watching these new-fangled cinematographic pictures at the Charity Bazaar in Paris.

A man named S. A. Andree, with notable courage, went up in the air in a balloon at Spitzbergen and started for the North Pole; a person styled an "anarchist" cut short the life of Premier Canovas del Castillo in Spain and a man named Azcarraga became the next premier; in the interests of civilization men with the latest weapons of warfare moved on lesser frontiers in India, suppressing natives, thereby leaving Waziri, Fulah and Afridi widows to mourn for the suppressed.

Ships' guns spoke as sailors of the Powers bombarded the Greeks, battling the Turks, on the island of Crete. Lifeless bodies lay among the sugar fields of Cuba as Spanish soldiers passed on their way; and the Germans seized Kiau-Chau after two missionaries had been most basely murdered.

Burning against injustice, General Morales led a revolt against President Barrios in Guatemala; the world seemed to be going to pot in Austria, where Count Badeni found the government paralyzed; strikers hoped against hope in Colorado, Pennsylvania and Hamburg, while a goodly number of adult persons spent many hours becoming expert in knocking a little ball about in a game named ping-pong.

In France a few brave men were working to gain revision of sentence for Alfred Dreyfus, while the world blithely whistled something about Tararara-boomdeay and how sweet Daisy looked on a bicycle built for two, and decided that this man, Albert Chevalier, was "a card".

2

IN the beginning there were tears—scalding drops that came with the vague tragedies of childhood. They left shiny runnels on his cheeks that smarted and burned.

There were tears when Peter, the golliwog, couldn't be found; tears when he woke up at night and found himself so horribly alone in the vastness of his cot; tears when cook sang the sad song about the boy in blue who died on the battlefield; tears when the first remembered Christmas morning broke without those counterpanes of snow which stories and pictures had promised; tears when nurse announced that he was grown up at last and henceforth would walk of afternoons instead of being pushed in the perambulator. Saddest of all were the tears when Emily, the maid, scolded him for some vague sin and vowed she loved him no more. Not to be loved was misery-tragedy—and Tregan cried.

Pain of tears was alleviated on the day that Tregan discovered that the drops were salty. By putting out his tongue he could touch the runnels on his cheeks. The saline tang was piquant. This was the first time that warmth of profound discovery left only academic interest in woes. It wasn't to be the last.

The deep and tearful sadnesses of infancy became less devastating as his faculties grew. He found it great fun to take clinical case-notes on the strange affairs in the life of Llewellyn Tregan. When he was taken to church for the first time, he was warned not to cry. He found nothing sad there. It was fun. Everyone sang—much louder than cook did in the kitchen. Even his father sang. His father never sang at home. He sang in church. That was strange. His father sang from behind his big moustache.

But on the way home Tregan cried. They were walking home, walking many miles—or so it seemed to Tregan with his short steps and long perspectives of childhood. It seemed sad to have a world so vast—such a terribly large and empty world. He cried. His father carried him. The memory always persisted, half-dimly—his father carrying him, the rough shoulder of a tweed coat scratching against his cheeks that smarted from the tears and the sea breeze, the pungent smell of the rough fabric. It was strange, the smell of that fabric. It became so all-absorbing that he forgot to cry any more. With his whole being entranced in the smell of tear-stained tweed, he fell asleep.

Later in life the picture of his father almost faded from his memory and finally there was little left but the intangible memory of a smell—a mixed smell of Russian leather and wet tweed impregnated with woodsmoke.

Many years later a girl gave him a Russian leather wallet. Whenever he carried it the curious odor welled over the floodgates of memory, stabbed vividly into the past and recalled a father who sang from behind his moustache in church.

There was almost the same childish impression of his mother—the smell of perfume as she bent over his cot late one night, the touch of a heavily dotted veil on his face as she kissed him.

"I don't want to wake him," she had said in a low voice to someone in the darkness.

Tregan, with the guile of a child, had pretended to be asleep. Later he wished he hadn't. Soon after she was gone. He was told that she was dead.

Not long after that his father vanished from his small ken too. Tregan didn't see him again for many years. His father was abroad. That was what his mother's aunt told him sternly. He felt somehow that it was a terrible sin to have a mother dead and a father abroad.

Then both parents began to be part of the forgotten. There were letters from his father—epistles bearing large and strange postage stamps. Then his parents went entirely from his mind. He lived with his mother's relatives and they were sufficient unto the day. Only very occasionally the disturbing thought half-smouldered in the back of his brain that there was something strange hanging over him.

As he grew up, all that died down and he began to discover many things. Very early he discovered that, as a Tregan, he was a little important in the village. He also discovered that his accent was different from that of the village boys about him. This he took as another mark of strangeness—something to be looked on with shame—so he tried to talk like the village boys and the housemaids. One day he used a dialectic word at the dinner table to which he had just been promoted. His great-uncle ordered him to the kitchen to eat with the servants. Tregan learned quickly. After that he spoke correctly at home; but once across the threshold he broadened his vowels and zoomed his sibilants to his heart's content.

As he grew up his childhood in Devon became a halcyon affair. It was full of the glamour and mystery that a sensitive child can imbue into life. He peopled the countryside with pixies and smugglers. He read a story of American Wild West life. After that the tangled moor became a prairie, each

cliff was a bluff, every spinney a trackless forest, all the gorse patches were cottonwood.

It was pleasant—childhood. Infancy had been tears over tragic reality; boyhood was the joy of escape. There were days in summer with the moor baking in the sun. He used to lie flat, his face pressed close to the earth. The rich smell of dry bracken would almost intoxicate him.

In the autumn there was the fog that swept up noisomely from the coast to bring the premature evenings. Then the windows would glow kindly through the mist, the sheep-bells would tinkle dolefully, far off a dog would bark, a mother would stand at her door in the village and call for her child, the boys would halloo to one another through the drifting curtains. It was a sweet interlude that lasted until grownups brought tragedy again. He was sent away to school.

At the village school he had been quite content. He had weltered in the comfort of being one of many instead of being a child among grownups. He had learned prisoner's base, collected birds' eggs, eaten raw turnips and fought sod fights. All this his mother's relatives had viewed with alarm. They sent him away to a "gentleman's school."

3

DR. REX'S ACADEMY for the Sons of Gentlemen is gone now, along with many others of kindred calibre. Their passing is mourned by gouty old gentlemen with memories that work best under the influence of sherry.

It was a poor place, badly furnished and evilly mastered. The desks were carved with dirt-engrained initials, mute testimony of the years of hopeless scholars who had dinted the surface of education and passed on to a badly taught manhood.

The classrooms smelled of acidy ink. When the sun struck through the half-clean windows thousands of dust-motes swirled in silver sarabands in the rays—danced their brief dance and then passed into the oblivion of shadow.

Tregan always watched the dust-mote dance on sunny days. They whirled especially well in the early morning light while Dr. Rex read the matutinary Bible lesson. This, known to the boys as "scripsha", was the "fine moral and spiritual atmosphere" of which Dr. Rex's Academy boasted so highly. Dr. Rex was firmly in favor of it. It impressed parents, it cost nothing, and it gave Dr. Rex a chance to hear his own voice booming unctuously. He would read sonorously from the nicer parts of the Bible (skipping such reprehensible books as Leviticus), pronouncing his words lovingly and long. He was never conscious that few of the children understood anything of his teachings about God, who, it seemed to most of the boys, was merely a rather unsporting aide to all the teachers in general and to Dr. Rex in particular—a sort of stool-pigeon who could spy on you even in the dark.

Sometimes, while the morning lesson went on and the dust-motes whirled and spun, Tregan would wonder whether Dr. Rex really communed with God in person and whether when he, Tregan, grew up he too would converse with the same Jehovah. He would wonder vaguely and grow sleepy. The monotone of the headmaster would lull him. He never became aware that Dr. Rex was reading of stirring doings—that the Old Testament was a glorious saga of the laws, lives and battles of a hardy race that the world has never stamped to extinction; or that the New Testament contained fairly accurate and often beautifully written life accounts of a gentle teacher of philosophy who actually walked with the fishermen of Galilee. Tregan

never suspected that. So he was always highly relieved when Dr. Rex droned:

" 'Pete wimmie!"

Then Tregan, with the rest, would gabble in unison:

"Ah father—charten He'n—load be thy name—thy kingham come—thy will be done—'nearth—stizzen He'n—givvus stay ah daily bread—givvus ah trespsiz—zweefagivoses tresps again stuz—leeders notinter temtash'n—liverous f'meevil—thine skingham—paah, glor'—frevverendeavor—Amen."

After these morning prayers had imbued the boys with an understanding and love of the Holy Trinity, the school settled down to the mystery of something called "lessons".

In these there was never any attempt to interest the boys in the amazing amount of fascinating and palatable knowledge which a grownup can reveal to a youngster. There was history, according to which the world began with the landing of the Romans in 55 B. C. and which continued on until some unknown and misty era which would be reached, no doubt, in a higher and equally unknown classroom.

And then there were "sums". It was sums that taught Tregan his first scorn for grownups.

Sums were puzzling things which consisted of determining how many boys got how many apples if you changed the number of boys and number of apples each time. The early and easy ones would ask how many apples each boy got if there were nine apples and three boys.

Grownups answered that question, Tregan discovered, by writing down the figure 9. Then they placed reversed parentheses about it, wrote the symbol 3 before it and a similar symbol 3 after it, placed another 9 under the first one, drew a line under it and then put a zero under the last nine. By some system of unexplained orientation, the second 3 was the "ansa".

Tregan never quite solved this very first mathematical formula. He would close his eyes for his sums and let them solve themselves. There he would see the three boys standing in the sun. He would play with the idea. One of the boys might have red hair and a freckle on his nose—the second might be Smith Minor with his ears sticking out—the third could be young Hawkins with his blond cowlick. There they were standing in a neat row in the sunlight. There before them were the nine apples, each gleaming red (Tregan liked them red) and suspended in mid-air with no visible means of support. Three boys, nine apples, turn on the switch—and presto! You saw the apples moving of their own accord, the boys stretched out their hands.

And each boy got three apples—it couldn't be otherwise—for there were three apples resting in each boy's hand, one on top of the other. It was all so simple.

Thus Tregan, seeing this picture in a few seconds, was always able to get the answers to his sums almost as soon as they were stated; but he always failed miserably in the examinations because he couldn't remember (or wouldn't learn) how to draw the lines and curlycues and boxes that were demanded. In examinations all he could do was to write down the answers. And it seems that the sole virtue of "sums" was the procedure.

By thus missing the first principles of arithmetic Tregan went through life forced to do his mathematics by visualization—a mishap which later allowed him to do intricate mental problems before most men could have set them down on paper.

Another item in the curriculum which thwarted Tregan's best endeavor to unravel was "Handy nigh work". This resolved itself in later years to "Hand and Eye Work". It consisted solely of filling in printed designs with water colors and was the nearest approach to the finer arts that Dr. Rex's Academy attained. The paramount virtue of the game was placing the colors exactly within the printed lines. If you could make the finished product look as if it were one of a million impressions that had been run off a printing press, you were a classic Handy-nighist.

The colors were divided into two groups: three primary colors and three secondary. These were used with monotonous regularity and searing proximity. No one ever tried to instill into the boys an understanding love for color. No one ever explained color and light.

And this time Tregan found no short cut; so he went through life with half his visual senses stunted. This fact, however, he was not to know until later years when he heard people talking of colors that he could not see and which he knew he never would see.

In music Tregan fared a little better. The classic educational system of England looked upon music as a sort of decadent Italian effeminacy—something that wasn't quite the thing for the sturdy young sons of British Gentlemen. True, there was a half-hour period of tonic sol-fa, a system which Tregan never bothered to understand. He went through his entire schooling without ever hearing of the delicacies of Chopin, the grandeur of Beethoven or the gigantic emotional lithographs of Wagner. It is doubtful whether, during his school years, he ever heard the names mentioned, and most certainly he never learned to read a note of music. Fortunately he had a good soprano voice and a superlatively accurate ear which defied the worst

efforts of his masters. In the morning chapel he sang, joyfully and irresponsibly, altos of his own improvisation and soon worked out a weird and complex system of arrangements, based partly on mathematical sequences and partly upon his accurate ear, which enabled him to play on the organ. In his last term he would climb to the organ loft and improvise for as long as he was allowed. However, the "competent staff" of the Rex Academy never had the slightest inkling of this unusual aptitude and facility. So no report on musical leanings was ever made to his aunt and uncle. For his own part, Tregan went through his schooling considering it just another of those queer earmarks which are best hidden from the so-public gaze of the public school.

In his reading Tregan was much more fortunate; but this was not a direct result of Dr. Rex and his school or of his home life. In his strict Quaker home the literary fare had been limited to *Pilgrim's Progress*, a teetotalist propaganda book entitled *Buy Your Own Cherries*, and a Sunday School weekly.

It remained for the penny dreadfuls of the era to reveal to Tregan the intoxication of the printed word. Although they were *verboten* the boys managed to smuggle into the Academy those admirable literary concoctions, product of fecund minds, whose characters dashed weekly through series of picturesque and hair-raising exploits. With the principals of one weekly output, an American, Englishman and Negro known as Jack, Sam and Pete, Tregan roamed round the world, into the steaming jungles of India, over the South African veldt and into the fastnesses of the Australian bush. With Deadwood Dick and a valiant of an earlier day, who rejoiced in the title of Silvershot, he thundered after herds of bison on the western plains and shot redskins from the saddle at full gallop. Under the spell of still another paper-backed narcotic, he stole over Hounslow with Tom King and Blueskin, while Dick Turpin, mounted on the pirouetting Black Bess, called in his ringing voice: "Stand and deliver!"

It is safe to say that Tregan learned more history and geography in the stolen hours with these illegal serials than in all the rest of his schooling combined. At least, at the age of ten he could have given you a fairly complete account of the western portion of the United States, the navigability of the Athabaska River, the topographical characteristics of Uganda, the methods used in washing and mining gold, the dress and habits of the men who blazed the Chisholm Trail, the speech and manners of the inhabitants of London during the century when Turpin reigned over the roads, the life and customs of the natives of India and Tasmania, the military system of the Zulus under Chaka and the proper procedure to be followed in

erecting an Eskimo igloo—and these facts, most undoubtedly, were never taught in Dr. Rex's Academy for the Sons of British Gentlemen. Dr. Rex's men specialized on dates, not knowledge.

4

FORTUNATE was Tregan when Alan Keithley came to the Academy to exert a brief but refreshing influence upon the few score stifled children.

Keithley was one of those clear-faced and mentally sound young men which every country in the world turns out at times—and which each nation rejoices in considering as typical of her own product. Had he been a German or a Scandinavian he would have skied, hiked with a rucksack and entered the army. Had he been American he would have been a thoroughly sound catcher on his college nine, a trustworthy tackle or guard on the varsity squad, and would have gone on into life as a minor official in a Wall Street concern. Being an Englishman he played a sturdy game on the Rugby field as fullback, held a straight bat on the cricket pitch, and found himself at twenty-three with no satisfactory field of future endeavor. It is because she offers so few opportunities for the Alan Keithleys that Britain is able to send such steady streams of capable and healthy young men to God-forsaken stations in the extremely remote and just as extremely unhealthy spots of the world.

Grasping at a straw Keithley took an assistant master's post at Dr. Rex's Academy, where he spent many hours chucking yorkers to the young cricket hopefuls (thereby becoming something after the manner of a godhead) and some few minutes speaking blunt truths at the master's table (thereby becoming something of a hated *rara avis* to the browbeaten staff).

When, on one half-holiday, Keithley wandered far from the institutional aura of the school and found Tregan belly-down in the coarse grass on a clifftop, reading one of the forbidden paperbacks, the boy looked at the master with an expression much akin to that which both were to see later on the faces of German prisoners brought back in a sudden and bloody raiding party.

That such a fear should strike a young boy amazed and horrified Keithley. He felt as though he were in contact with some unclean thing—and as though, curiously, he were the less clean. He squatted beside the boy, who gazed at him steadily, meanwhile trying to hide the penny dreadful behind his back.

"Jack, Sam and Pete?" asked Keithley, in an effort to disarm the boy of fear.

Tregan did not answer—he only stared. Long ago he had learned that the ways of masters were strange and devious; that a gentle question was but guile to bring open confession which would be followed by punishment, cold and calloused. Sometimes, Tregan knew, the punishment was preceded by these one-sided orations in which the master, both accuser and judge, argued a complete case before himself, awarded himself the verdict, and appointed himself the executor of swift justice. It was part of the game at Dr. Rex's Academy to hold thus the sword of punishment over the head of the helpless accused—although none of the masters would have been anything but horrified to hear of the exploits of Count de Sade.

So Tregan looked at the master without answering. Keithley felt the enormous importance of dispelling the horrible fear in the boy. He started talking against time.

"You know, I used to read them all myself," he said. "I'd read them now, I think, if I had time."

He hardly knew how to go on in face of the boy's silence.

"Look here," he said. "Why are you so afraid?"

The boy was still silent.

"Fear, Tregan," said the young master, "is a rotten thing—much worse than the crime that inspires it. Don't ever be afraid like you are now. You can lie and cheat and steal, but as long as you're not afraid you're still a man. You don't learn that in school—but I'd like to teach it. Here you are, Tregan, afraid just because I caught you reading a penny dreadful—and they're not bad. I used to read 'em."

The boy half smiled. Perhaps, he thought, old Keithley wasn't going to get him caned.

"Where are they now?" asked Keithley.

"In Madagascar," Tregan almost whispered.

"Madagascar! Great place, that!"

"Have you been there, sir?"

"Me? Goodness, no—never been further than Switzerland in my life. Have an uncle out there, though. Writes letters—sends us pictures. Raising coffee—married to a Portuguese woman—she's very handsome—can't talk English. He doesn't ever want to come home again. Rummy fellow."

They sat quietly for a while.

"What do they raise in Madagascar?" If he could only get the boy talking, Keithley thought.

His ruse worked quickly. The question, more normal in its relationship between master and boy, swept Tregan up in a breeze of interest. Like all youngsters with a keen mind he loved to show off.

"Coffee, sir—you said that. And bananas, pineapples, sugar-cane, cocoanuts, all kinds of fruit. The natives catch fish and dry them in the sun."

"Where do you get that?"

"It says so in this week's, sir. They're on a plantation where they rescue the owner's daughter from the natives. She falls in love with Jack but he's never going to marry anyhow—he never does like any of the girls they rescue."

The boy chattered on while the cool English sun slanted down on the clifftop. The larks climbed, twittering egocentrically, as if to climb to the ultimate height and to sing beyond all capacity of a tiny body was the only matter of importance. The sun slanted lower and lower and the cool wind turned in from the sea.

"Well, young man, we'd better cut back," said Keithley, finally, tapping his pipe on his boot. "Incidentally, you'd better give me that paperback. I'll stuff it in my pocket. I'll give you something else instead. That is, if you like to read."

"You mean books, sir?"

"Why, yes. Don't you like to read books?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't like *Pilgrim's Progress* much."

Keithley felt angry—an anger that surged partly against the boy but more against the system that charted such arid educational paths. There it was—the barren answer—and against it the wealth of literature in English, the only art that this foggy island has touched with deep understanding.

"Wait until I light my pipe," said Keithley. They stood and he thought quickly.

"I don't want to jaw you, son," he said, finally, "but try to remember this—if you don't savvy it now try to remember it later on. These paperbacks are good stuff—no doubt about that. They're full of life and they're talking idiom. But there's so much to read in the world. You wouldn't get time for it all if you started reading now and went on until blazes. Some day you're going to be amazed at the number of things you want to read. Then you'll wish that you had some of the time you spent on Jack, Sam and Pete.

"You'll find out some day that all books are not like schoolbooks. There are books, thousands and thousands of 'em, that are exciting and vivid and alive. Better even than Jack, Sam and Pete. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do I mean, then?"

"You mean I ought to start reading good books."

"Well, not exactly, but something after that manner I suppose. I don't know whether they're good books or not. I don't know what a good book is. The word good means so many things to so many people. But maybe you'll understand more of this later if you can remember it. At any rate, take this—and come over to my place when you've finished it if you like and I'll give you another."

Keithley turned and hurried over the quadrangle. Tregan stood looking at a battered pocket copy of *Lavengro*. That evening he lived the idyll of George Borrow's gypsies.

The amazing discovery of books deluged the boy. His voracity was as limitless as his taste was catholic. The days that followed saw him ripping through *The Vicar of Wakefield* with little regard for the good doctor. *The Shropshire Lad* puzzled him. *Pickwick Papers* and its verbal cartoon characters hardly touched his consciousness. Unaware of its satire he dismissed Gulliver's peripatetics as childish. *Soldiers Three*, *Sherlock Holmes*, a treatise by Havelock Ellis, and *Three Musketeers* he romped through with blithe ease. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* he read on one Sunday. *King Solomon's Mines* fascinated him.

But it remained for *Lorna Doone*, *Westward Ho!* and *Don Quixote* really to hold him. These tales of bold doings submerged him in their atmosphere. His daily life in school became a thing of shadowy fiction. It was a thing to be lived but half-consciously during the impatient hours until he could cut away to Keithley's room—there to lie prone on a carpet which became in turn a rock overlooking the country of the dour Doones, a tar-seamed deck that burned the bare feet of a bold mariner sniffing the spice-laden breeze of the Spanish main, or that sunbaked Castilian plain where a Don rode with a Sancho.

And while Tregan read, wallowing in new worlds, a storm raged above his head. Keithley was unpopular with the staff in proportion to the reverse regard in which the students held him. So there was a devious whispering from a master to a master, and from him to another one, all of which, of course, finally reached the ear of Dr. Rex, who had never failed to hear a whisper in thirty-four years of schooling. And Keithley was called into the most august, and equally dusty, sanctum of the head.

Did he, Keithley, realize, began Dr. Rex, just what impression was caused by the continual presence in his room of a member of the fourth

form?

Keithley, with hardened face, refused to take a short cut. He felt an enormous necessity for making this smug man mouth words which he was skirting as gingerly as a cat walks a puddled pavement. So while Dr. Rex perspired a little and fumed a little and tried devious routes, the young man pushed him toward a precipice of bald statement.

"But of a certainty," Dr. Rex said, "you must apprehend readily the impression that people will get. A . . . ah . . . thoroughly false one . . . *ça va sans dire* . . . of course . . . there could be no doubt whatsoever of that."

And Dr. Rex looked over his glasses as if to imply that he was imbued with an all-encompassing magnanimity for thus giving Keithley the benefit of a doubt.

"But as long as one is in a school," Dr. Rex went on, "there is always a necessity for . . . ah . . . moral safeguards."

Keithley, looking upon the mass of cells that lived, moved and had being, just as a worm lives, moves and has being, remarked quietly that he had as yet to discover the particular . . . ah . . . moral safeguard that was shattered by carefully furthering a boy's pursuit of knowledge in an institute founded exactly for that purpose. Would Dr. Rex speak more plainly?

Dr. Rex oozed a little more perspiration, wished most heartily that he had never started the conversation—wished indeed that he had never engaged this most unpleasant young man who stared so directly and who refused to show himself aware of topics that other masters discussed freely in low tones and often with smug relish. So, finally, Dr. Rex spoke words that tasted badly in his mouth. And Keithley replied with words that sounded hotly in the doctor's ears. Dr. Rex's dignity went on the rack, and Keithley's resignation at the end of the term was tendered and accepted.

5

WOMEN were wondering how large a Merry Widow hat could be without becoming too ultra, and newspapers told how a squadron of warships had been ordered to Tangier to bring back an American named Perdicaris who had been kidnapped by Moroccan bandits.

With headlong haste the Dalai Lama fled from Thibet for India; people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of the nine hundred and fifty people, mostly children, who had been burned to death on the *General Slocum* in the East River of New York harbor.

A man named Wright, with notable courage, went up in an airplane at Kitty Hawk; in the interests of civilization soldiers armed with latest weapons of warfare moved in Somaliland suppressing the natives, leaving many Somali widows to mourn for the suppressed.

Ships' guns spoke aboard the *Potemkin* in the Black Sea as sailors went into revolt and bombarded a city. Lifeless bodies floated on the waters as the German gunboat *Panther* sank the Haitian gunboat *Crète-à-Pierrot* for violations committed against a German merchantman.

Burning against injustice, the Herreros revolted under German domination in Southwest Africa, and defeated German forces—which wasn't quite the way for things to turn out from the white man's point of view; the world seemed to be going to pot in Russia where hundreds were dying of starvation; many statesmen delivered themselves of the profound opinion that world trade was bound to recover soon, and a goodly percentage of the people in the civilized world spent many hours learning a game called roller-skating.

At Westminster a few brave men were investigating the horrors committed on the natives of the Congo Free State, while the world blithely whistled something about Yip-I-addy-I-ay and how Obadiah should swing me just a little bit higher, and decided that this man, George Robey, was "a card".

6

AT the end of the term Keithley packed his trunks and departed leaving behind him the *Don Quixote* as a parting gift. Tregan always kept the volume. He never saw Keithley again. To tell the truth he soon forgot him completely.

Despite the venerable doctor's circumspect tremblings for his purity, Tregan hadn't much inkling of the entanglements of sex at that time. The boys at Dr. Rex's Academy were of an average sturdiness of character that defied the evils made possible by the English emulation of the Greek system of training with its enforced athletics and resultant worship of the body.

In his younger years, being male, Tregan felt a little shy in the presence of girls. His first love episode passed tremulously and deeply. It is a mistake to suppose that children's love affairs are not deep and poignant. They are, perhaps, more painful than those of grownups for they can never reach satisfactory fruition.

Tregan had gone home for the Christmas holidays with Radclyffe, a careless, rawboned youngster from the North country. Radclyffe's sister Edith was a year older than Tregan. The three played incessantly a game called Pirate's Cave, which consisted for the most part in racing, tackling, and hiding in every room of the big old house. Edith and Tregan hid together on a dark stairway leading to the maids' rooms. In the hushed proximity Tregan felt his heart thumping. He could feel the warmth of the girl beside him. Her hair fell back over her shoulders. It smelled of a faint aroma that was decidedly unboyish. In the darkness his hand crept toward hers. They crouched silently thus for an hour, neither daring to move. Radclyffe had given up searching for them long before. Both Tregan and Edith were tremulously aware of this, but they waited, unmoving, awed.

For the rest of the stay Radclyffe, his sister and Tregan played the game continually. As soon as it started the girl and Tregan would walk to the close dark of the stairs and sit there, hands just touching and a breathless racing of hearts stifling them. Radclyffe avoided them scornfully. He made no attempt to find them, leaving the game altogether, going down to the lake. In the damp and cold mistiness he threw stones at indignant swans until the head gardener scolded him.

Once back to school again Tregan felt that his life was a thing of shattered fragments. The drone of lessons and the calls of the boys on the playing field seemed unbelievably cruel realities. He suffered genuine

sorrow—all the love-aches of the sentimental swain of mature years were his.

For months he held tight to the memory of Edith. At the first opportunity—the short winter holiday—he went North with Radclyffe again. In the stuffy compartment of the train that drummed over ties and clacked over points he lived a thousand years. The drive from the station in the dog-trap was like a hallucination.

Then, finally, he saw Edith. He stared. She nodded to him. She had grown taller.

Tregan tried to catch at the intangible intimacy that had been theirs before. There was nothing to clutch. And somehow Tregan was glad. Happily he spent the holidays sledding with Radclyffe. A sudden frost came down and froze the lake, leaving the swans to waddle about disconsolately. It was the first ice Tregan had seen. He and Radclyffe turned the place into a section of the wild Hudson Bay land. They peopled the countryside with Indians and caribou. They lived a running saga of frozen adventure amid alders that were suddenly gum-maples. Tregan forgot entirely about Edith. Love had passed with rustling robes.

The next summer Tregan took Radclyffe to visit at his home. They scrambled over the crags collecting more birds' eggs and were happy.

One Sunday evening they walked down to the fishing village. The summer holidays had brought a quota of trippers from London.

Tregan and Radclyffe strolled on the seafront—what the natives called the Monkey's Promenade. There the vacationists paraded on summer evenings: girls, arm in arm, walking with endless self-consciousness up and down the one-mile stretch; behind them the straw-hatted clerks from London shops, puffing Woodbines.

Tregan and Radclyffe found themselves talking to two girls. Radclyffe turned down the parade with one. Tregan felt suddenly uncomfortable. He linked arms with the other and followed. He tried to talk to her but she giggled. He wished he had never walked to the Promenade.

At the end of the causeway the walk became unpaved, straggling away in the darkness to a footpath up the cliffs. Tregan and the girl stopped. It was dark. Tregan knew that he must do something. The nearness of the girl repelled him. He knew he must begin. He put his arm about her waist. She turned her body to his and lifted her face. The cheap picture hat fell back over her shoulders. Her lips were soft and sticky.

Suddenly she swept her hat back on her head.

"Oooo!" she said. "What a spooner!"

The cheap accent built palisades of class-consciousness about Tregan.

"I'd like another," he lied valiantly.

"Not 'ere," she whispered. She looked at him obliquely.

" 'Ow about up on the clifftop?" she suggested.

Tregan wished wildly for escape. He prayed for someone—Radclyffe—anyone—to come quickly. He followed her up the steep path. At the top they were in darkness. The town twinkled below. She threw herself down on the tangled grass.

"It's a little bit of all right here," she said.

Tregan sat beside her and put his arms about her again. He felt her sinking backward. Her head lay among the sweet-smelling heath grass as he kissed her. He was afraid. He wanted to get away. He sat upright suddenly and looked out to sea. She lay there, quietly. The minutes marched and finally she sat up, straightening her hair slowly.

"Watcha lookin' at?"

"The ship," said Tregan. They looked at it twinkling out on the horizon. "I wondered where it was going."

She stood up.

"Aw, ships!" she said.

There was a pause. He could hear her crying softly.

"What's the matter? I'm sorry."

"I liked you," she said, simply.

"And I like you, too," said Tregan. "I'll kiss you again if you like."

She held up her face. The sticky softness of her lips repelled him again.

"We'd better go down again," he said.

She straightened her clothes.

"Lookit my skirt," she shrilled. "You shouldn'ta brought me up here."

Tregan didn't reply. With most ungallant haste he preceded her down the footpath, leaving her to scramble along behind him alone. At the bottom he waited. They linked arms again and walked into the light. Radclyffe and the other girl hailed them and they all walked back together. The schoolboys left, promising to write.

"Have a hot time, old man?" asked Radclyffe.

Tregan wanted to strike him.

"Rather," he answered.

Neither of them mentioned the episode again.

7

BACK at school Tregan plunged into normal routine. He had that brilliant, superficial type of mind which absorbs without effort. As a student he was the kind teachers like—who carries off prizes and who performs brilliantly on days when parents flock to show-off exercises.

As he went into the higher forms he found himself somewhat of a leader, although this puzzled him. With Radclyffe and half a dozen more of the older boys he whipped the school into a healthy condition. This was not a merit to be placed at the shrine of the masters or Dr. Rex. Almost unconsciously the small handful of older boys exerted their influence. Because they were inherently decent they brought decency into the dormitories, stamped out much petty tale-bearing to masters, made bullying and sycophantic fagging unpopular, and breathed a general breath of normality even into the classrooms.

Entirely unaware of having achieved anything whatsoever, Tregan went his way, playing a sound but unshining game at left wing, scoring steady and unsensational twenties and thirties on the cricket pitch and waiting patiently in the boredom of classes which hitched themselves to the mental speed of the least common denominator.

He still went into more books than were good for him, racing through them, understanding a few and half-understanding more.

It was in his last term that he became deeply religious. He believed firmly in the torture of purgatory and the terrors of a brimstone hell; but no less he believed in the glory of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

The institutional barrenness of religion as expressed in the school chapel was dispelled when Tregan first wandered into the church at Pengyllan. As a monitor of the school he had more freedom and was able to get down to the small town nearby on Sundays. Like thousands before him he was swept away emotionally by the Church of England ritual. The droning of the responses, the flickering of the candles, the soaring majesties of the old Gothic pillars, all submerged him in a spiritual ecstasy. The æsthetic starvation of English school life brought him back week after week, hungering for the beauty of the service.

It seemed especially significant to him that the pastor bore the same name as himself—Tregan.

Soon afterwards the hat of the Reverend Dennis Tregan was found on a clifftop. It was feared that he had fallen into the sea. Fisherfolk searched for the body. One fisherman was drowned when a boat was crushed at the base of the cliff. The hunt for the clergyman's body was given up.

A great memorial service was held at the Pengyllan Church. A bishop attended and the sweet incense eddied in billows. The chanting of the choir seemed to Tregan the epitome of audible sadness. He cried.

Rumors rumbled in the village. A girl, one of the most fervent workers in the Reverend Dennis Tregan's flock, had disappeared at the same time as the minister. The wife of the departed pastor denied with indignation. The village sniffed with suspicion. Someone told Tregan that "Old Tregan did a bunk to Australia with a village girl." Tregan wondered why God did not send down the lightning bolts to strike the gossip dead.

Later, someone brought in a newspaper clipping. It was true. There it was in print. The print seemed to make it undeniable—irrefutable.

Tregan walked to the clifftop that night. He cogitated on God and his ministers, on incense and candles, on cassock and surplice, on cup and communion.

Suddenly, as quick as the blow from a sword, Tregan knew there was no God of the churches.

He stood in a slight drizzle. Out on the Channel the Atlantic steamers twinkled faintly as they beat down to the open sea. Tregan turned his face upward.

"There is no God," he shouted aloud. "I dare God to strike me dead if He's there."

He waited. There was nothing but the cold rain falling miserably on his face and the steamers beating down the Channel. At that time he was thirteen.

8

WOMEN were wondering how narrow a hobble skirt could be without becoming too ultra, and newspapers told how the Pope had refused to grant audience to Theodore Roosevelt.

In headlong haste many people moved from Kiev where Russians were putting anti-Jewish feelings into concrete expression, and people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of the two hundred thousand people who had died in the earthquake at Messina, Italy.

A man named Walter Wellman, with notable courage, went up in the air in a dirigible and started out in a vain attempt to cross the Atlantic; Premier Bourtos Pasha of Egypt was assassinated by a man styled in the press as a "nationalist student"; a "crazed man" tried to assassinate Mayor Gaynor of New York; in the interests of civilization soldiers armed with the latest weapons of warfare moved in Albania, suppressing the natives and leaving many Albanian widows to mourn the suppressed.

Sailors aboard warships revolted and shelled the harbor at Rio de Janeiro and lifeless bodies lay on Moroccan sands as the Mad Mullah began killing off unarmed natives—a prerogative hitherto reserved for ambitious brigadiers of the civilized powers. Burning against injustice, the rebels of Nicaragua met the Federals at San Vicente and defeated them; the world seemed to be going to pot in Portugal where people rose in desperation, forcing the royal family to flee to the better-guarded precincts of Gibraltar; strikers hoped against hope in the coal fields of the world; many statesmen delivered themselves of the profound opinion that world trade was bound to recover soon, and a goodly percentage of the people in the world spent many hours learning a game called diabolo.

King Edward died; the earth passed through the tail of Halley's comet; a mob in Newark, New Jersey, lynched Carl Etherington, an Anti-Saloon League detective; the Paris Academy discovery of an anti-typhus vaccine was announced; the world whistled something about yiddle on your fiddle and how it was afraid to go home in the dark, and decided that this man, John Bunny, was "a card".

9

THE last term drew to an end and life began racing for Tregan. His great-uncle sent him one of the infrequent letters. The angular script said that his father had married again and wished him to go to America. If he did not wish to go, the letter said, he need not. His uncle and aunt would always be glad to bring him up as their own son.

The letter flooded Tregan with half-forgotten emotions and atrophied memories. In the years of schooling the thought of his parents had been pushed further and further into the background. The cloud of having a mother who was suddenly dead and a father "abroad" had faded completely. Tregan could not remember his father at all. There was only that mixed smell of Russian leather and port wine and tweed impregnated with woodsmoke. That was all.

But it did not take Tregan long to decide. America was adventure, romance, a foreign land. There were skyscrapers, dollars, cottonwood clumps, Sioux, creeks, cactus, ranches, cowboys, buffalo, sumachs, toboggans, prairies, trolley cars, rattlesnakes and rustlers—or was it hustlers? Tregan wasn't quite sure of the last; but he repeated the words over and over. They felt like salt spray in his mouth—pungent and strong. It was America.

So he heard the seagulls scream over the Mersey and saw the liver bird gleaming golden as the sun sent a lariat of light over the fog; he smelled the spume and listened to the wind moaning through the rigging; he watched the perpetual rainbow in the bow-spray during the day and stared at the phosphorescence that danced in the churned wake at night.

The memory of that first voyage, to the most minute details, never left him. In later life he was to forget the things that happened the day before yesterday; but time never eradicated the deeply-etched intaglio of that first adventure into living. He could shut his eyes at any time and see again the sunlight slashing sharp-edged patterns across the desk where he and a plump, soft-fleshed young Irish woman lolled back in deck-chairs. He never forgot the well-deck where the steerage passengers danced wild peasant flings from unknown parts of Europe to the eternal wail of one of a half dozen accordions that screamed day and night. His memory never let go of the feeling that was his as the warm, pungent smell of land swept out to greet the ship, just as it had swept out to meet Columbus's men when the Indies were near. Nor did he ever forget the bitter coldness of the

immigration facilities which Uncle Sam deems a fitting greeting for future citizens—the whitewashed walls, the cold insults of calloused petty officialdom, the sour institutional smell, the bars that made him feel like an animal among other unclean animals.

It was only a short time until he was whisked through the contamination of the immigration system and then he saw a man walking toward him.

Still hot-palmed with rage the boy watched the man who walked forward. This man—his father—he did not know him. He had expected that, in some miraculous way, there would be instantaneous recognition, a warmth of contact that would flash as quickly as an electric current, arms to hold him tightly to a coat that smelled of woodsmoke as they had done years before.

But this was a strange man, tall, handsome, dressed severely and smartly, who leaked at him with disapproval in his eyes. Instantly hatred of this man welled up in Tregan—hatred of America and its immigration houses that made him feel like a filthy animal.

For his part, Tregan's father made the usual adult's error of underestimating a child's perception. When the smile of welcome was hoisted it came too late. The boy turned toward his luggage a second before the man extended his hand.

From that instant a strange war of wills began.

"Before we go home we'll do some shopping," said the man.

He turned the boy around as one might a model. It was the first spoken greeting. He looked at the boy's Eton jacket and long grey trousers. Tregan was saying to himself:

"I hate him. I hate him and I'll always hate this beastly country."

"Your collar's soiled," said his father.

The man hurried him to the center of the city, bought new and different clothes. The Eton suit went, Tregan was back in short knickers, his hair was cropped in American style. He held his chin high.

That night, in a strange bed, Tregan cried although he had thought himself a man. If only his father had gripped him tight at that first moment.

10

THE next two years in that large Eastern city of the United States were the most lonesome of Tregan's life. The man battled silently with the boy. Because Tregan was the son of his father he fought back as stubbornly. There was never any open avowal of hostilities, only the long warfare of underground mining and sapping. The father had the advantage of parental authority, the boy the greater energy and resourcefulness of the child.

Tregan fought his father silently, and fought the strange world that he was in—a world of invigorating freshness that he wanted to accept him. But people smiled when they heard him talk and so he learned not to speak. Later he knew that his accent had amused and pleased them; but in the first warped bitterness he knew only that they laughed. So he set himself purposefully to kill the roundness of his vowels.

For the boys of his own age who roller-skated along the sidewalks of the suburb, he had little but scorn. If this scorn was based on the fact that he felt they were middle class, you must forgive Tregan, for his life to that point had been founded on the basis that you associated only with gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen.

In this lonesomeness of the first two years he wandered far afield. His English habit of walking never left him, and he tramped on long hikes of fifteen and twenty miles. In his enforced silence he developed a habit of observation. He listened to the people who travelled with him on trolley cars and ferry-boats. His active mind rated them, diagnosed them, sorted and classified them and it became precociously introspective.

But no one can stay unhappy forever. The norm descends and makes of misery a happiness. And Tregan learned to find enjoyment in lonesomeness.

In his long hikes his developed discernment discovered new and searing beauties. He never forgot the glory of his first Indian summer in America, with sumachs and maples metamorphosed into savage scarlets and burnished golds, the countryside rife with a riot of hot colors, a scene that put the sodden English autumn to shame as would a rich plum pudding beside a plain suet dumpling.

He stood under an autumn maple that sent shower after shower of gold slanting down in the afternoon sunlight and cried: "Danaë! Danaë!" Then he ran away quickly, afraid lest anyone had seen him.

One day he wandered into a crowded mill district. About him zoomed the English accents. He could pick them out—Yorkshire, Lancashire, Midland, a little Cockney. There were Scottish brogues and far-down Irish voices.

But again Tregan found himself isolated. They were his own countrymen but he couldn't talk to them in this land of the free and home of the brave. They were working class. At home he could have talked to them as he talked to Radclyffe's old gardener who used to recite for them the Yorkshiremen's motto about hearing all, seeing all and saying nowt and paying nowt. That was at home—here he was still a Tregan.

But the mill district drew him again and again. Without talking to them, he listened; found out that they were spinners and weavers, drawn to the new land by high wages. He went each evening to the shopping streets in the mill area, mixing with the crowds and finding a sort of peace in the homely accents that cascaded about him.

The strange battle continued between the boy and his father. Sometimes Tregan was teeming with excitement over the things he had seen; but the father never asked him how he spent his days. The boy never made the first move.

Curiously enough, he found his first warmth of friendship in his step-mother, a warm, voluptuous Spanish woman—quick and sympathetic. For some time she watched the boy without speaking to him. One day he walked into the darkened parlor and found her setting up old ivory chessmen on a board. He watched her without a word.

"Sit down," she said.

Tregan sat.

"No, in the chair opposite to me."

He moved.

"These little ones are pawns," she said without waiting a second. "This is the castle and this the knight."

"Don Quixote," said the boy quickly.

"Yes," she answered.

The afternoon raced away and Tregan learned chess. He plunged into it as he plunged into anything that challenged his mind. He refused to read a book on it—he wanted to master it himself. He found it was "sums" over again. You just switched on the moving picture camera in your mind's eye. There were the pieces before your eyes as plain as plain. You saw them

moving of their own accord, from square to square—the knight leaping, the pawn pushing inexorably forward, the rook sliding across—and there you were—there was your checkmate!

In a month Tregan was far ahead of the woman with the dark, warm face. The games ended only one way. Tregan, his eyes shining, his hair gleaming like a bright halo in the half-darkness of the parlor, would move a piece. The woman would study the board long and then see the inevitable. Invariably with an outburst of Spanish she would sweep the board and men flying from the table in exasperation. Tregan grew to expect it. He would laugh in his triumph and creep about in the semi-darkness to find the scattered pieces. Before he had them all the woman, in her dark clothes, heavy gold chains and crucifix dangling from her neck, would be helping him.

Finally she would smile, light a dark brown cigarette (that filled Tregan with admiration and awe) and talk to him—tell him about the days of years before in Madrid; the sun that never, never failed to shine; the garden where she sat with her duenna; the young men who threw roses through the gate; the opera back in the late 90's when she was a girl. As she talked her heavy English became more and more cross-stitched with Spanish until Tregan was lost entirely. He never halted her, though, but sat in the shaded room watching the animated face and the great, dark eyes that flashed and told eloquently of the vividness of the memories.

Tregan enjoyed the games in the darkened room. But his contact with his step-mother sprang from a deeper desire than for friendship alone. Without any analysis of his motives, he was strengthening his position in the running warfare with his father; he was the unconscious diplomat, cutting off the friend of his enemy and solidifying his own position with a new *entente cordiale*.

Days came when the boy sat quietly at his step-mother's feet while she sang to him. Or sometimes she would repeat the couplets to him—bits of brightness that were joy to her.

He learned to sing:

She would beat time with her hands and the heavy gold neck-chains would dance in agitated corroboration.

Once she brought out a guitar and sat in the darkened room playing intricate allemandes and preludes. Her fingers, heavy with the ornate rings that ennobled her hands and were ennobled by them, danced over the frets with incredible rapidity. The dim light flashed against the stones, the long jet

earrings swung and leaped, the gold chains writhed like snakes. It seemed to grow darker and darker until Tregan, fascinated, could see only the white fingers, as in a vignette, chasing madly over the frets. It seemed beyond belief that two hands with but ten fingers could touch so many strings—the tunes whirled and eddied in furious pursuits and harmonies so complicated that Tregan could have sworn ten persons were playing instead of one.

She rose to her feet and began an insistent tune of obstinate beats. Slowly her long black skirts began to sway as her heels stamped softly the clicking rhythm. Moving but an inch at a time she circled toward the middle of the room, the skirt undulating as the heels stamped imperious tempo.

To Tregan it seemed as if he had lived it all before—as though once he had done all this—long, long ago. He knew how this dance went.

He rose and placed his hands on his hips. Facing the woman he crept toward her inch by inch, tattooing the insistent rubato of the rhythm. He circled slowly, a foot away from her. Her fingers plucked louder at the strings, her skirt swayed and her tiny heels stamped, louder and louder. Suddenly she stopped. Tregan, turning, saw his father looking in at the door.

The man turned away without a word. The boy and the woman stood. The guitar hung loosely from her fingers. It was as if they had been caught in a weird sin that had lain unknown for forty centuries until they disinterred it.

The next day came the decisive battle of the long, intramural warfare between the boy and his father, with Tregan winning a Pyrrhic victory. The boy forced the onus of open hostilities into the hands of his opponent.

“Since you have so much time to spend you might as well mow the lawn,” Tregan’s father said.

The boy stood still. “No!” he said, finally.

“Why not?” asked his father. “The devil finds work for idle hands—and yours must not remain idle.”

How could Tregan tell him why not? Lawns were mowed by gardeners. You might push a lawnmower for fun—but not out in front of these American houses where no wall protected you from everyone’s gaze. You couldn’t because—well, you just couldn’t!

“I’ll get the black boy to do it to-day, sir,” Tregan said.

“No, you’ll do it yourself. You must obey.”

“I can’t,” said Tregan. And then his father boxed his ears suddenly. It was as if all the compound interest of the wrath between the two was expressed in the light tap. The boy smiled. He had won his paradoxical

victory. No grownup had ever struck him before. He felt the fingermarks glowing on his face.

In this climax to two years of hateful maneuvering it was the father who was hurt most. He opened the way to armistice.

"You must always obey me, son," he said.

Tregan shook his head obstinately. It was as if he had a pawn advantage —a pawn that he would push ruthlessly forward until the tiny preponderance weighed down the scale and won the game. It was move for move.

"You cannot be a son of mine if you disobey me."

Tregan accepted the gambit.

"Then I must go away."

And the next move was: "If you do you shall never come back."

"I shall never come back," said the boy. There was the checkmate. The long game was finished.

That night he stole downstairs quietly. At the foot he saw his step-mother standing. As he looked at her he felt the first tinge of regret. Tregan spoke softly.

"He thinks because I'm a kid I'll be afraid to do it. He's dared me to . . . and I'm never coming back."

The woman smiled sadly as if the wisdom of all ages was hers. She clutched Tregan tight to her breast. Under the coolness of her linen nightdress he felt the warmth of her against his cheek.

"I've got to go," he said.

She pressed some money into his hand.

"Thank you. Goodbye."

She whipped a gold chain from her neck.

"San Christophe," she said. "For travellers—the Holy Father himself has blessed it. Don't lose it."

Tregan felt the warmth of the chain on his neck. He opened the door quietly and slipped out. The moonlight struck patterns of the overhanging maple boughs across the walk and glistened on the heavy dew that tipped the blades of grass on the lawn. That lawn—it did need mowing, at that. And the chain! He'd better tuck the religious medal inside his shirt. He'd look jolly silly if anyone saw him walking along with a woman's chain round his neck.

He tucked it inside his clothes. As he walked down the street and the medal tapped on his chest he experienced for the first time that feeling of

utter futility that accompanies important decisions in life.

11

WOMEN were wondering how military these Lady Duff Gordon fashions could become without being too ultra and with a great deal of newspaper publicity General Cipriano Castro, ex-president of Venezuela, was barred from entrance into the United States on grounds of moral turpitude.

In headlong haste people fled from towns in the vicinity of Verdun where the German forces were staging another push and people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of those hundreds of Belgian babies who had been spitted on bayonets.

A German sea captain named Koenig, with notable courage, went under the sea in a cargo submarine at Kiel and made a voyage to America; soldiers armed with the latest weapons of warfare moved over European battlefields suppressing one another; and many people suspected that statesmen had mixed matters up on this occasion by sending well-armed troops against similarly equipped antagonists instead of against badly armed natives. Lifeless bodies lay doubled up along French roads and Russian marshes, leaving many widows of all nations to mourn for those successfully suppressed.

Ships' guns spoke at Jutland as the German fleet sallied out and got back again; burning against injustice Sir Roger Casement led a revolt against the British, was caught landing arms in Ireland from a German auxiliary cruiser and was hanged for his trouble; the world seemed to be going to pot in Russia where starvation was rife; Pancho Villa lined up nineteen Americans and shot them whereupon several thousands of National Guardsmen got a free vacation down on the Mexican border; Wilson was re-elected President of the United States on the slogan: "He kept us out of war"; many statesmen delivered themselves of the profound opinion that world trade was bound to recover again after the war was over; and a goodly percentage of the people in the world spent many hours learning how to march in columns of four and squeeze (not pull) the trigger of a high-powered rifle.

Claude Achille Debussy died; General Gallieni, who saved the French army, was allowed to resign without thanks; a few souls declared that war and all pertaining to it was insane, while the world blithely whistled a song about Ti-a-de-da and how far it was to Tipperary, and decided that this man, Charlie Chaplin, was "a card."

12

TREGAN learned. He learned that pride is a small thing when hunger leaves visiting cards. He gained knowledge from books and experience from freedom.

As the boy, so the youth: stubborn, yet sensitive; lazy and brilliant by turns; discerning, yet scornful of people less blessed than himself. But in all his moods there was a blind passionate reaching for beauty—he ended each day with a vague hope that the next would reveal something to him. He didn't know just what this would be.

Suddenly he had a sharp-edged conviction. He must go on with schooling. In search of it he found his way to a New England city. There he felt much happiness. The city of learning, despite a reputation for snobbishness, seemed to have open arms for young students with empty pockets.

He found that by running a dormitory elevator at night he could earn enough to study by day. He waded into courses with an eclectic dash. Six months of portrait painting convinced him that he should be a musician. Six months spent in finding out that there were tortuous mazes of nomenclature which must be passed to reach what he already knew by instinct ended his musical career. To spend months finding out that a mediant was called a mediant seemed silly. The virtue of being able to call a thing by its name was an empty victory, he decided.

He discovered Hawthorne and, characteristically, submerged himself madly in the atmosphere of Colonial New England. One by one he took things, devoured the best of them, and hurried on to something new.

As he lingered in the town, life became easier. The threat of hunger disappeared when he found friends who seemed to know by experience the particular merit of inviting growing young men to dinner at not too infrequent intervals.

He expanded under friendships like a sunflower beside a warm southern wall. When he discovered that people were not laughing at his accent, but merely enjoying it, he learned to chatter again. He laughed once more as the Americans told him gravely: "I am English myself, you know."

"Yes? Where in England were you born?" Tregan would ask.

"I? Oh, I wasn't born in England myself, but I'm English—my great-great-grandfather came from Leicestershire."

Tregan would roll in merriment at the manner in which these proxy Englanders would pronounce a four-syllabled "Ly-ces-ter-shyer."

In the contact of friendship there came a rapid Americanization—one of which he was not aware. But whether he desired it or not he became a different Tregan from the boy who scorned other lads on roller-skates because they were middle class; who couldn't mow a lawn in public because—well, just because you couldn't. And as his outlook changed the memory of England began to fade. And, like all fading dreams, home-land began to take on the roseate aura of enchantment that distance lends.

Then he was eighteen and years had leaked away quickly. Tregan was swept by one of the sudden impulses which always, in him, submerged everything but the desire of the moment. He wanted to go to war. America, it seemed, would stay neutral forever. He caught a train, crossed into Canada, and enlisted.

This time there was an even more bitter lesson in adjustment. He began the struggle to adapt himself to the physical obscenities of army life—men herded closely in training camps; the proximity of sweating bodies; stench of latrines when the encampment was given a wholesale administration of jalap in the food by an all-wise medical staff; nauseating grime of kitchen police duty; intentionally filthy conversation of the older soldiers as they sat at meals; the monotonous obscenities of the non-commissioned officers who tried to make the volunteer's life one of perpetual misery.

Through it all Tregan passed almost untouched. The glamour of the uniform that the King's men wore blinded him to the sordid training life.

He was going to war—to fight for an ideal! It wasn't so much what you were fighting for. The important part was that you *had* to fight—for the good of your own soul.

He walked with his head high and learned to burnish buttons.

The rows of tents on the great plain were beautifully precise—row after row—endless vistas that formed myriad abstract patterns of canvas and ropes and peaks.

Inside each tent eight men burnished and polished and shaved and swore and gambled and argued and sang and slept. Each morning they rose to bugles and a pipe-band that swaggered magnificently down the rows between the tents. In shirt-tails, with eyes heavy, the soldiers tumbled out, pulling on breeches in the cold air as the gay ribbons streamed from the

drones of the bagpipes and the drummers whirled their sticks and thumped the bull-drums with fierce military pomp.

In the great tent city of thousands of men, all moved in daily rounds by unseen hands of the great gods of high rank, they groomed their horses and mucked out the great stable marquees and polished saddles and came to smell of horses and manure and the ammonia of urine.

There were days when the sun cracked down on them and they left behind tunics. With bandoliers crossed over their shirt-fronts, with wide-brimmed hats turned up at the side, with spurs jutting from boots, they mounted and swept over the plain. In great formations they wheeled with clink and clatter of bridles and accoutrements, knee to knee they raced in flank movements, the horses sailing belly-high over oceans of blue ragged-robins. The men sometimes bent over from the saddle and plucked the flowers to stick in the turned-tip brims of their hats.

And there were long hours in the riding schools, hours of drilling on bareback when the sweat ran from the horses and the recruits fell gladly to the ground in hope of rest—only to have the riding-school sergeant-major wheel his mare and chase them after the still-trotting horse that went by force of habit round the ring in its proper place. He would crack his long whip in the direction of their sore behinds and make them run alongside their horses crying: “Who told you to dismount? God damn you, get back on that horse!” And the men would run alongside their horses, vainly pretending to try to climb back.

The soldiers loved that—the lusty jokes of the sergeant-major who rode like a Centaur and swore more and bigger oaths than they’d ever heard before.

To Tregan, who could ride smoothly from the beginning, it became warmly sweet to hear the hard-mouthed jokes that always came. When, in schooling jumps, the rider slid onto the withers or clasped the horse’s neck, the sergeant-major always shouted: “You bloody lulu! Get off that horse’s neck! You’ll give him a headache!”

Then there was the day when Tregan, slyly taking some of the weight from his seat in a long bareback schooling, began to use his elbows in unorthodox counter-balance, and the sergeant-major cried: “Tregan! You lulu! You look like a bloody angel with a sore bottom!” And Tregan grinned as he sat down to the trot.

And there was always that stock lecture to the newest recruits. Tregan never tired of hearing the sergeant-major as he gathered the new men and began his talk: “Here is a hawse!” (It was always a “hawse.”) “A hawse

bites with his front end and kicks with his rear end. So we put the saddle in the middle. We always do everything with a reason in the army."

Then there were the sports days when the sergeant-major let them show off. That, Tregan waited for. Each man would be called to show his horse; to start from the walk to the canter; from canter to dead halt in a horse-length; to pick handkerchiefs from the ground at the gallop; to post on both diagonals; to lead into a canter on left and on right; to go over the jumps; to take sabre and slice a lemon and then pink a hanging ring. And after that there was the big wrestling match when the reds and the blues pulled each other from their horses until one side won—or the big single-stick war in which they split into two great teams and smashed and cracked at the colored balloons fastened to their masks.

This was life for Tregan; he believed this was the glory of military service.

But best of all he liked the maneuvers. Gone then were pink balloons and dropped handkerchiefs. In the dead of night they lined up, saddles heavy with rolled blankets and raincoats, with rations and feed. In the dark they would troop away, into the mystery of the night, a cavalcade that clattered in the silence. There would come the midnight camp—then the zero hour. The information of "enemy lines" would come in. Suddenly, the trumpets. The horsemen would race for vantage points.

Once it was a bridge. Through the night they rode. Trot, walk; trot, walk. The horses breathed heavily. The main body was left behind. The best-mounted men were sent forward in the last drive. Tregan had a great Irish mare that trotted faster than most of the ride could canter. They pounded on, mile after mile. Through the moonlight that silvered the world they clattered through a little town where lights began to wink as people woke to the noise of war. As the mist of dawn turned pink with the rising sun they were almost at the goal and racing to the river.

Then came dawn and the last spurt—and the opposing vedettes could be seen sweeping down the far hillside. They spurred and left the road. Shortcutting across the fields the Irish mare flew over the ditches and hedges. She sailed across the great fence, pounded through the field, clattered onto the bridge, and stood stock-fast as Tregan swung down from the saddle.

He flopped on the ground as the lieutenant of the rival force galloped to the planking a second later.

"It's ours!" shouted Tregan. "I killed you as you rode up."

The riding-school sergeant-major galloped up on his close-coupled mare.

"I saw him get here first, sir. It's ours."

Tregan grinned happily.

But there was also the day when he, working independently, decided to fortify a lone haystack. He dug out a great hollow and hid his horse inside the hay. He climbed to the top and waited. His "army" was on the retreat; the vedettes were covering.

He waited an hour in the sun, and then, round the farm-house, came the brigadier—to-day in command of the victorious army. Tregan waited. The brigadier, happy that his paper plans were going so nicely, tittuped up the cart-path. At twenty paces Tregan let him have it; full in the chest—with a blank cartridge. The brigadier's charger reared.

"Come out of that damnation haystack," roared the general.

Tregan stood.

"You're dead. I'm covering the retreat, sir."

"Come out of that haystack and don't be a bloody fool," roared the general.

Tregan clambered down and stood to his horse. The brigadier's staff came up respectfully, Tregan, somehow, was sent to the rear as a "prisoner," thus proving that rank is superior to life and death—except in the honesty of real war.

But Tregan was thinking: "I did kill him. He shouldn't have come up until his scouts had looked into that haystack. I held a good position on my own hook, and I did kill him. I really did kill him."

But it didn't matter. Generals were superior to death in those wars—the wars which knocked off at 5.30 P. M. usually—so that the guard could be mounted on time and with proper formality. And then the soldiers would shine and shave and brush and dust and set caps a-trim and bandoliers at the right angle and loop newly pipe-clayed lanyards over one shoulder. They would go to town and with riding crops swinging from gloved hands, and spurs with specially-doctored rowels a-clinking. They would strut up and down the streets—rows of soldiers, four by four, spurs jingling in time, the salt of the earth. They would feel sorry for the baggy-kneed infantrymen and the bonneted and kilted Scotties who, poor fools, had not had the wisdom nor foresight to join a mounted outfit.

They would swing into the movie shows; or into the church canteens where they would crowd round pianos and sing while the church ladies smiled benignly. Then, at 11.30, there was the exodus from town—the mass rush for the last street car to camp—and always ten times as many men as there were seats. One got to know the conductors and their ways; to kid and

jolly them; to rag and tease; to evade payment of fares; to mob the car and climb to the roof. Finally, soldiers hanging from every projection of the car, it would lumber away into the darkness, off over the country roads, with the troops roaring:

> "*When I dream about the moonlight on the Wabash,*
> *Then I long for my I-i-i-india-a-a-ana home.*"

One day, suddenly, the camp was paraded. The brigadier read from a paper. Infantry was needed in France—needed badly. Those who would transfer to infantry would be sent overseas immediately. Those willing to transfer—would they step forward?

Much to Tregan's surprise he found there were only two hundred or so of them that seemed intent on getting to the war.

Tregan was in England, learning to drive his body forward with all the strength of his legs as he swung his rifle butt at the groin of a sackcloth dummy (who soon would be replaced, the instructors said, by a bloody Fritz).

It was here he felt the machine closing down on him. Slowly Tregan began to realize that the camp was run on that very basis of Prussianistic discipline which he believed they were going to war to stamp out. Squadrons of picked instructors chivvied them and badgered them, showered them with the mud of practised obscenities, reduced the fine enthusiasm that had prompted them to enlist to a grudging obedience of multifarious petty mandates.

Tregan walked suddenly one day to the headquarters and was paraded before a company commander. He laid newly-won sergeant's chevrons on the desk.

"What the devil is this for?" boomed the company commander.

"I enlisted because I wanted to serve—not because I had to come, sir," said Tregan. "Now we're being battered by a system—one that I don't like. Nearly all the other sergeants are Imperials—we're Canadians. I'd rather be a man."

Tregan was "crimed" for impertinence, frivolity and insolence for this gesture. When the charges were read against him at the company hearing, it appeared as if he'd also committed many other grave offenses against the body of His Majesty. Tregan was stubborn. As when, in America, he had refused to be anything but an Englishman, here, by reverse process, he refused to be English and thought of himself continually as a Canadian—a Colonial who resented the assumption of Imperial superiority.

When he was asked his plea against the charges Tregan replied: “Guilty, with extenuating circumstances.”

The phrase caused a tempest. A hurried sidebar conference was held.

“That is no plea—are you guilty or not guilty?” he was asked.

“Guilty, if you wish, sir,” said Tregan.

The bravado brought pack drill. With full equipment he marched up and down the barrack square alone at parade step. As soon as regular training hours were over he turned out with full kit and, as a bored corporal looked on, he plodded the monotonous paces up and down, arm swinging from the shoulder and rifle at the correct slope. Then he was placed on garbage police. With other fractious souls he rode about in a wagon redolent of long-gone meals. He helped collect the Government garbage, which was shipped to Government piggeries, there to fatten Government pigs, which were made into Government sausage and shipped to Government camps, where the Government’s soldiers dined on them and left fragments that again became Government garbage and started merrily on the whole circle of life again.

Tregan used to ponder on this idea, and he felt convinced that there must be a possibility that one calorie of food had thus made a complete round several times.

One day he relieved the monotony of scavenging by figuring the mathematical possibilities of the coincidence. If only one thousandth of the sausages found their way to the garbage pail, and there were five million calories served in this one camp, and one hundred such camps on the island, then there were five hundred million calories served of which five hundred thousand escaped. These came back as food again and once more five hundred of the original five hundred million escaped. Perhaps one lucky one of the five hundred might get through a third time and come to the table for the fourth time before it was taken into the maw of some soldier and thus removed from circulation.

Tregan laughed merrily as the conceit took form. You could have one stripe for the first escape, two stripes for the second escape; the third escape would see the gallant five hundred sausages coming back as sergeants—and if one did get through again, he’d have to be a sergeant-major. Of course, you could not give a commission to anything as plebeian as a ration sausage. Tregan couldn’t picture a sausage with a Sam Browne belt. It could have chevrons—possibly a crown—but never a Sam Browne. He laughed and swung table scraps into the wagon.

As he laughed he saw a girl watching him. She was a worker in one of the canteens run by women’s societies. She was “doing her bit for the boys.”

"You must be happy," she said.

"Why not?" grinned Tregan. "I'm a hardened criminal and nothing can make me sad."

He noticed that she was carrying a heavy bucket.

"Let me," he offered.

He swung the bucket of scraps over the sideboard of the wagon, then bowed low and swept his hat across his waist as he'd seen the Three Musketeers do on the stage.

"The first garbage pail ever returned with a flourish," he said.

She laughed softly.

"You shouldn't be doing work like this," he said. He looked at her apron of sacking that was splotched with greasy dampness. A wisp of hair hung down beside her flushed face.

"We want to do it. It's the only way we can help with all this." She waved her hand across the camp with a curious halting gesture. Tregan's ear held the softness of her voice. He had not talked to a girl for many months.

"And for that matter," she went on, "you shouldn't be doing work like this. What were you crimed for?"

He laughed at the incongruity of the soldier cant and the well-bred voice.

"It was for being silly enough to think that a man could serve God, King and Country with extenuating circumstances."

"You can't," she said softly. "You either serve or you don't."

The sanitary corporal called:

"Come on! Take the lead out of your behind, you Royal Canadian bastard!"

"You must pardon him," said Tregan. "That's the regiment I belong to. The Royal Canadian—"

"I heard it," she said gravely.

"Well. *Ich dien.* Am I going to see you again soon?"

"When you're not C.B. any more," she smiled.

"Only a week more," he said. "I'm not a very criminal criminal."

A week later Tregan walked into the service hut where she worked, his cap badge and his buttons gleaming, the swagger stick under his arm.

"I'm serving again," he said.

"So am I. Will you have tea?"

"Yes, tea."

"I can't talk much to-day—we're busy."

Tregan waited. The soldiers eddied round the counter. She drew one cupful after another from the big urn. A half hour passed.

"Is there any time when you're not as busy as this?" Tregan asked in desperation.

"Never. I'm always busy."

"What! Never?"

She laughed. "Hardly ever, is the answer to that, isn't it? I have Sunday afternoons off. Do you like to walk? Hurry, I'm busy."

"Is it all right for you to walk out with soldiers—I mean private soldiers?"

"I walk with anyone I choose."

"I'll call for you Sunday at two—if I don't get crimed."

"Do. I'll have to work now."

Time began to race.

That Sunday they walked over the downs. It rained. Tregan had thought the weather would make her stay indoors. But she came from the hut swinging a cane. Her semi-uniform was hidden by a waterproof trench-coat. She looked so entirely feminine.

They walked along a sodden English road into a valley where rooks cawed mournfully in dripping elms. So there the war seemed a long way away; thus they could talk of it again. She told him of her desire to help somehow. As the evening mist settled down they kissed.

That week the detachments began to be posted for duty overseas. The machine was closing down on them. They raced their lives against time. The front seemed very near.

On a Saturday afternoon they caught the ration truck and rode down to the village. They found the home of a minister who helped them get a wartime license. An hour later the boy and girl were promising to love, honor and obey until death did them part—while a hastily-summoned cook and a chambermaid, both inclined to maudlin tears, acted as witnesses.

When they stood again on the aged cobbled street they became shy. Neither knew what to do. They walked to the inn, bleak in wartime hopelessness. The middle-aged woman behind the desk looked at them sourly as Tregan registered. They blushed and fled. For hours they walked

about the few streets of the hamlet, talking of anything but marriage. The afternoon turned to evening. In the absolute darkness, with all street-lights unlit as air-raid protection, they held each other close. They ate in a church canteen. The hour became later. In desperation they went to the cinema in a dreary wooden building. At midnight there was no other place to go. They turned back to the hotel with lagging feet. Finally they were in the room with dingy plush furniture that bulked obscenely. They clung to each other. It was the first time Tregan had held a woman in his arms.

Tregan never was to forget the next morning and his awakening. His mind, attuned to reveilles and calls to stable in the half-darkness of dawn, flashed into consciousness. Momentarily he was bewildered by the place in which he was sleeping. He felt a strange warmth beside his own body—and then he remembered.

The girl was still asleep—long, light brown hair tumbling over the pillow. The boy pressed his face in it, and asked a God in whom he did not believe to do unto him tenfold if he ever brought this fellow-creature a moment of unhappiness or pain.

It might have been better for him to have prayed to something in which he did believe.

They lived days of fearful seconds that ticked nearer and nearer to the war that was closing down on them. After a bitterly short month Tregan was posted for draft. He did not mention it until the last moment. Then:

"The last night, Barbara," he said.

"I felt it. Exactly when?"

"Five-thirty in the morning. I must fall-in at five."

"There is still—still eight hours. And I love you, Tree," she said.

"I've fixed it so that I don't have to go back to camp. As long as I'm there at five."

In the small room that they had rented in the village they held each other tight.

"I've made my will to you in my paybook. Nothing will happen, of course, but I thought you'd like to know."

"Of course nothing will happen," she said.

"Then you'll get ten dollars a month of my pay and twenty dollars a month separation allowance from the Government. That's about six pounds a month."

“I won’t need it, Tree.”

“Shall you stay at the canteen?”

“For a while. It will seem nearer you. Then I can go home later.”

“Can your parents take care of you?”

She smiled.

“I’ve never thought to ask you about them,” he said. “In fact we haven’t talked about very much but us yet. Are they well-off?”

“Quite.”

They held each other warmly and the minutes ticked away madly.

“I don’t want to sleep,” he said. “It would be throwing time away.”

“You’ll be tired.”

“I’ll have plenty of time to be tired in later.”

Then his head nodded in the firelight and he slept. In the cold darkness before dawn she shook him. He stirred in the chair.

“Four-thirty, Tree,” she said.

“I slept!”

“Yes.”

“And you stayed awake?”

“Yes.”

“You shouldn’t have let me! Oh, you shouldn’t have let me! I wanted to keep the minutes.”

She comforted him.

“I know—it’s time now. You must hurry.”

She held up his greatcoat and he struggled into it, still thick with sleep.

“You’ll hear us coming past—the band—you’ll come to the station?”

“Yes, Tree.”

“And you won’t cry. It’s important. You won’t cry, will you?”

“I won’t cry, Tree. You see, you’ve got to go—all of you have got to go. All over England—and I can’t do much. It’s just that . . .” Her voice trailed off. “There’s a button loose on your greatcoat, Tree. Have you time and I’ll . . .”

“We haven’t any time now. . . .”

He tore himself away without looking at her and ran for the street. He heard his iron-shod ammunition boots clumping on the wooden stairs. They rang on the sidewalk.

It was still raining—always raining. The white road to the camp shone feebly in sodden darkness. He ran along blindly. His feet clumped and splashed in the puddles. He heard the bugle sounding faintly. "You've got a face like a horse's neck," it called. Fifteen minutes to assembly!

He could see faint lights twinkling in the tier of wooden huts that rose in bleak regularity up the hillside.

He ran—almost slipped in the mud—recovered. The guard challenged and he answered.

He ran into the hut. His equipment—all packed. He struggled into it.

"Come on, nah, me lads—smartly, smartly!"

The sergeant instructors were calling. No more Royal Canadian Bastards. They were going overseas now. The sergeants were talking as politely as they would have done to dead men. Perhaps they were dead men.

They were in line. The O.C. Draft was calling the roll. Voices were shouting in the darkness. The roll droned on, alphabetically. The P's, the R's, the S's. Here it came—"Thompson—Tillinghast—Tomlinson—Toms—Tregan—"

He shouted an answer. The roll was over. A flashlight shone on paper. They were in fours, moving. Lights flashed in the barracks. Cheering—the men left behind were cheering.

The sergeants were running alongside.

"Goodbye—goodbye! You were a good bunch of boys! Get a Blighty one and come home soon! Keep away from them French girls Goodbyeee!"

They were going back down the road over which he had run a few minutes before.

They were going. It had caught him. He couldn't escape. The band was playing. The feet were slogging through the puddles in unison. It was going to war. The big drum was beating. The iron rations were swinging in unison from the bottoms of the packs.

They were coming into the village. Barbara—he'd better watch for her.

The band sounded louder as they entered the village. The brasses re-echoed from the walls. The fifes and clarionets screamed. "The British Grenadiers." They weren't Grenadiers. Only Canadians. That was a current joke. Ma, look at the soldiers. Them ain't soldiers, lovey—them's only Caneyedians.

The feet tramped along. The band played. The old march shattered the dark stillness.

Some talk of Alexander
And some of Hercules—

Windows opened and heads leaned out. "Goodbyeee!" "Goodbye, Canada!"

He must watch for Barbara. She would be near the rooming house. He mustn't miss her—but she'd be sure to be at the station.

He saw her. She was running beside the column—looking at each row of fours. He called. She didn't hear. The band was too loud.

Of Hector and Lysander
And such great men as these.

"Let me take the outside," he shouted to the man beside him.

He clattered over clumsily, changing places. He picked up step.

There! She saw him.

"Tree!"

He clutched her. She walked beside him. They strode along in step. She took his rifle.

"No," he smiled.

"Please—somehow it's like helping. Tree! Please!"

She held the Lee Enfield, bulky in its breech-wrapping and canvas protectors, under her arm. The column swung along. The tune crashed louder.

But of all the world's great heroes
There's none that can compare.

They were wheeling into the station. "Nothing can happen to me," he said. "I'm coming back. I'm sure I'm coming back."

"Yes, Tree. You're coming back."

"That's right. Nothing can happen to me."

Some talk of Alexander
And some of Hercules.

The column swept through the gates. She was torn from him.

"Tree—your rifle!"

"Goodbye—I'm coming back. Nothing ever will happen to me."

He was swept along.

Of all the world's great heroes
There's none that can compare.

He was in a compartment. He fought to a window. “Let’s get to the window, fellah!” He tugged at a pack before him madly. He clutched the window edge and pulled himself forward. They battled in the dark compartment. He hardly knew it. They were pulling at him. He held on. He saw Barbara.

Of all the world’s great heroes—

“You got in?”

“Yes—I had to. I had to—I won’t cry, Tree. I told you I wouldn’t cry.”

He held her.

“Nothing will happen to me—ever. I’ll come back if I have to walk through a whole army.”

Some talk of Alexander—

She looked so small down on the platform. They were pulling at him inside the compartment. The minutes were slipping. Lanterns were waving on the platform. He must do something.

He wrenched the silver disc from his wrist. The chain snapped and dangled.

“Keep it—my identification disc—”

It didn’t seem enough. He tore the hat-badge from his cap savagely and dropped it in her hands. Things to hold to—to chain them together. It seemed so little.

Of Hector and Lysander
And such great men as these—

“I’m glad you’re going, Tree—always glad you went—always.”

“Nothing can happen to me—I’m coming back.”

So little to say. He lifted the gold chain and the St. Christopher medal from his neck—tugged it loose. He must give her something. He had done so little.

She shook her head.

“Please keep that—you’ll have it for protection—then you’ll come back.”

It dangled in his hands.

“Nothing will happen to me, ever,” he moaned. “I’m coming back.”

The train was moving. In the darkness there was bedlam. The troops cheered—on the platform voices shouted in the darkness. He was losing her.

She stood on a pile of mail sacks—her hand half lifted to wave. He could see her face half dimly.

The band was crashing out amid the din.

Her lip trembled. She hadn't cried. He thought of that.

"I'm coming back!" he shouted. "Nothing can happen—ever!"

She stood there quietly, her canteen hat turned up smartly at one side. Her hand fluttered. The train moved faster. And then he couldn't see her any more—only darkness.

13

TREGAN came home—but it didn't seem to matter. That was after the mail orderly left a letter beside his hospital cot. It said that Barbara had died in childbirth. After that there was a blank—the world became a sort of vacuum.

It didn't matter that he'd been a good soldier at the front. It didn't matter that he'd kept all the youthful idealism that he and Barbara had felt so strongly, that all through the dirt and filth of war he'd carried a picture that was beyond that. It didn't matter that he'd turned his eyes only to the patient courage of those who fought on without hope of life; that he had lived with the quiet heroism of men who stood with fear on their right hand and death on their left and refused to look at either. All the hundred acts of petty and patient bravery that he'd seen and that men were to forget later, all the wearers of khaki whom he had admired and tried to emulate—all that didn't matter.

Barbara had written him that the child was to be born—had begged him to try for leave. But then he had been long in France and was caught even more firmly in the machine. He had carried the letter in his left breast pocket—to ward off a chance machine-gun bullet. That was at first. Later he had prayed for a bullet that would send him home wounded—that would win him the leave that he couldn't get as long as he was unscathed—that would let him be near Barbara.

And all that didn't matter now. The shattered bones in his ankle—that had been too late. She was gone and there was only a foot that dragged a little clumsily.

Even that didn't matter. His mind refused to accept the wound as a fact. It was merely a nuisance—something after the order of a fly that settles persistently on your nose in the half-waking of a summer siesta.

He became convalescent and asked for leave. His figure seemed to have shrunk, for his uniform sagged on his body. It didn't seem important enough to have it tailored. He caught a train and went to see Barbara's family in Kent. He was dimly aware that they hated him as he sat in the great, old house. He hardly heard what they said to him—he looked through the window to the rolling lawn outside. Barbara had played there when she was small. There were old oaks and late summer sunlight streaming across the lawns in swatches of green-gold. She had left that to sling a garbage pail in a soldier's camp. Somehow she wanted to help.

The coarse apron of sacking had been splotched with greasy water—the wisp of hair had hung beside her face, that day by the canteen.

"It's the only way we could help with all this," she had said—and she had waved her hand in that queer little half-arrested gesture that was so much a part of her.

"I was silly enough to think that a man could serve God, King and Country with extenuating circumstances." He had said that. And she had answered so gravely: "You can't—you either serve or you don't."

And she had served—left this to throw mugs of tea on a counter for chaps in khaki. And it didn't matter now. It didn't matter that a nursemaid was walking down a path with a perambulator. It didn't seem real that it was his, the child in that. He laughed. Barbara's parents looked at him in a strange horror.

"Goodbye," he said. "You hate me—it's all right—it doesn't matter. You should. I'm not ever coming again."

The woman looked at him a little more kindly.

"Would you like to see the—your—"

"A boy?"

"No, a girl."

"It doesn't matter," he said. "You're afraid I'll take her away. I haven't any way to—no settled home just now. I'll catch the next train for town again."

It didn't matter, he thought, as the train raced through the countryside back to London. It wasn't that he was bitter, or brokenhearted, like people were in books. He just didn't feel anything. That was the trouble—not feeling anything. When he had gone away that was real. This was like life in a vacuum—like being a germ-cell that managed to live in a sterile solution. You touched things and you didn't feel them.

Not feeling anything was hell. The blessed anodyne of pain wouldn't come.

He was still the same when the war ended, when he was limping about—a useless soldier in a reserve camp. It didn't matter. Once such things had been important.

He got his discharge in England after some trouble. He went to London. There were quite a good many young men there to whom things weren't important. It didn't matter to them, either. They lived aimlessly. Someone

always managed to have some money somehow. There were pension checks and cherry cobblers. The months went past without mattering. The war was gone and ex-soldiers were a penny a bushel. No one mentioned it. It didn't seem worth while.

Once he wrote his great-aunt and uncle down in Devon that he was going to visit them. He meant to go; but he stood in the station bar drinking champagne cocktails with one of the fellows. It was pretty nearly fun. His aunt and uncle would be waiting when the train pulled it; but that didn't seem to matter much. The whole country was learning that things didn't matter half as much as you had thought they did. It was the era of unimportance.

One day, simply because it wasn't important, he caught a boat for New York. It didn't matter whether you stayed in London or not—it didn't matter that you were leaving behind all the fellows you knew. It wasn't important to them that you left.

The boat sailed and you met more people on board. You got off and there were more people ashore. Not as many people who didn't matter as in London. New York hadn't been touched by the sudden Peace as thoroughly as London. But there were enough chaps who realized the beauty of unimportance. You could find plenty of them in Greenwich Village. Prohibition had come in but it wasn't worth bothering about as a law—so you rigged up your own still. There were lots of good fellows around Park Row—all the newspaper fellows were good lads. They had to be appreciators of the unimportant to work so hard for so little. They never had much time for slow drinking, but they managed to see the unimportance of sleep and thus they caught up somehow.

And because so many good fellows congregated round the blind tigers near Park Row Tregan became a newspaperman. To help out a friend he covered a court on a daily assignment for a news association. The work seemed unimportant enough not to matter, so he stuck to it.

He had no real desire for it at first. He did not thrill to it as many young men did. But he became an adequate craftsman almost from instinct—the old urge of childhood to do everything easily and well reared its head and drove him harder than he wished to be driven.

He wandered about the country from one smoke-blanketed newspaper office to another and became one of the legion of floaters who know the city editor of almost every paper from the Boston *Transcript* to the San Francisco *Chronicle*. He found that a glib method of writing was a less

needed equipment than the ability to stand at the bar of a blind tiger with other hardy souls and swallow drink after drink of excruciating liquor.

He learned to become the hard-boiled reporter that custom demands in all phases—except women. Sometimes, like a knife cutting through live flesh, he remembered suddenly the soft-spoken, slim girl whose hair had cascaded over the pillow in the stillness of the dirty little room in the wartime inn. That seemed to matter—so he tried not to think of it.

Then one day there came a woman and then it didn't seem good to remember Barbara at all. After that they passed like beads on a string.

The years brought little change. It would be merely the same routine on another paper. All would be alike. Only the street names were different—streets and the names of the Mayor and Chief of Police.

One day he thought it wouldn't matter much if he went home. He telephoned the office, threw his clothes in a suitcase and caught a train.

He was amazed to find his father dead. Somehow he hadn't considered that happening. Was it six years since the war? Time had evaporated like an afternoon rain on a hot pavement. But it didn't matter.

His step-mother cried on his shoulder. She seemed to have grown smaller. They stood in the dark parlor.

"I lost the San Christophe medal," he said. "I hung it up on a tree in Artois while I washed in a puddle. Then I forgot it until I was six miles away. But I walked back for it. I did! I walked back but it was gone. I didn't want to lose it."

She looked at him. Pity was in her eyes. Suddenly she held out her arms and cradled his head.

If only someone had done that long before. He was tired of moving about. He knelt at her feet in the room where they'd played chess so long ago—it seemed so many years. She held his head on her lap and stroked it.

"Bright hair," she said. "Bright hair."

Suddenly Tregan hated himself. He didn't want anyone to feel sorry for him.

"Bright hair," she said, almost like the words of a chant.

And the afternoon grew darker just as it always had done long before.

"I think I'll settle down here a while," he said.

"We always kept your room for you."

He shook his head. "I'll get some place near here—then coming to see you will always be as good as this. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my son," she said.

And Tregan entered another phase of life. The years became suddenly peaceful.

When he met Joan things seemed to matter a little again. She was a reporter on the society page of his paper. She hated that. It seemed important that she loved him fiercely.

She was Joan, and he said to her: "What about us?"

"Well, what?"

"I mean about what you're going to do. You might as well move in here with me. Why don't you? It would be swell having you here."

"It would be swell being here—but somehow I don't want to."

"We could get a bigger place—this is pretty small but we could chip in and get a bigger one."

"This is all right. I haven't a housekeeper's mind."

"Why not move over then? We might as well. Everyone knows we're just about living together."

"Hell on that," she said. "I don't give a damn what everyone knows."

"I didn't mean it that way. God knows I've nothing to care about it. To hell with people."

"To hell with 'em, sure. Look, what people say doesn't worry me. I'm your mistress, all right. I am because I choose to be. I give you that much; but I want some of myself. I'll go on living with Ann."

"I don't see why you do. Do you like her?"

"Christ, no. She drives me half-nuts. I don't get along with women anyhow. But between living with her, whom I hate, and you, whom I love, I choose her—somehow it leaves me with more of myself after all the swapping is evened out. Do you understand?"

"No."

"Well, neither do I if it comes to that. But I know I'm not going to live with you. Everything else, all right. I love you. I said that. But I love myself, too. And loving myself I will be more to you if I seem less."

"That sounds like circles. To hell with it, anyhow."

"All right. We have being—and here's to it as long as it lasts."

"Don't say that. I feel cold inside when you talk like that."

"It'll bust some day," she said.

He watched her as she lolled on the sofa in his room. Dark hair and grey eyes, warm mouth and stubborn chin—calm beauty over slumbering moods that sometimes erupted through the serenity as suddenly as ever Etna ran over.

"It's as you say," he said finally. "Everyone at the office knows it somehow. You don't mind?"

"Mind hell! The good little fairies have been waiting to get something on me. They'll love it all."

"We'll pick up and get to another town—I have a job down in New Orleans if I want to go."

"No—I guess we'll stay here. I'll stick on with Ann—I'll stay with you sometimes. We'll get along better that way. I suppose we don't want freedom so much as we do the pretense of it. I'll go on working and then I won't be a kept woman—I'll have to try that some time."

"As you say."

"All right. We'll take the ride as far as it goes—then I'll walk back. I have before and I suppose I will again."

She loved him with a brooding sort of love that by its very deepness submerged him. And in that love, as the months and seasons passed, he rested like a child in a cradle.

It was as if the war were really over, at long last.

14

WOMEN were wondering how low these sun-tan bathing suits could become without being too ultra, and with a great deal of newspaper publicity, the phrase "destroyed by German fury" was carved in the balustrade of the new Louvain Library.

In headlong haste people fled to Majorca, where, it was said, you could live, with a villa and two servants, my dear, for thirty dollars a month, and people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of those seventy-seven girls illegally committed to state institutions by testimony of perjurers in the New York Vice Squad.

A man named Redfern, with notable courage, went up in the air in a vain attempt to fly from the United States to South America; Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency, Governor of the Punjab, was shot by a man named Hari Kishan, who later was executed; and soldiers armed with the latest weapons of warfare moved in Nicaragua suppressing the natives, leaving many Nicaraguan widows to mourn for the suppressed.

Lifeless bodies lay on the plains of the Kiangsai Province in China as 100,000 innocents were slain by "communists."

Burning against injustice, rebels moved against the government of Panama and Don Ricardo J. Affaro took the presidential post offered him, according to law, by the Panamanian Supreme Court. The world seemed to be going to pot in Arkansas, where 500 hungry farmers raided the business section of the town of England, demanding food and threatening to take it from stores; 34,000 textile workers in Sweden hoped against hope while 200,000 cotton operatives were locked out in Lancashire; many statesmen delivered themselves of the profound opinion that prosperity was just around the corner, and a goodly number of the people in the world spent many hours learning a game called contract.

Pope Pius cited birth control as a "hateful abomination"; 4000 people, including city officials of a town in Louisiana, attended the funeral of a dog killed by an automobile accident; a mob in Maryville, Missouri, chained one Raymond Gunn to the roof of a schoolhouse and burned him and the building to ashes (Mr. Gunn being, needless to say, a Negro); while the world blithely whistled something about boop-boop-a-doop and how two hearts beat in three-quarter time, and decided that this man, Jimmy Durante, was "a card."

PART TWO

"*Like sweet bells jangled,*
out of tune and harsh."
—SHAKESPEARE.

15

TREGAN closed his desk quietly and hurried from the local room. The old familiar smell of engraving room acids, hot newsprint and ink was shut off sharply as though by an invisible bulkhead. He loafed down the sidewalk with the afternoon crowds. The city street's susurrance was a soothing pianissimo after the agitated staccato of telegraph sounders and automatic printers.

A wave of faint alarm surged in him as he walked. It was a winter of discontent. He spoke the words—winter of discontent. It made him angry. Why this necessity for framing phrases—wrapping moods in neat coatings of words—words that bowed to each other and strutted and postured like puppets in a ballet? Why words? Thought should be fluid. "Winter of discontent" meant nothing. He was just uneasy—but at what?

In the last three years with Joan he had found an energetic peace in the tumult. And now that seemed to be passing—again the urge to tear things and run away. And he had thought he was through with travelling around—one town after another—London and things that didn't matter—the inane and monotonous chase of nothing that had been his after Barbara had—

Barbara—cool eyes and a half-arrested gesture of a fluttering hand. He hadn't thought of her for—for two days.

He almost laughed at himself. It couldn't be a very real sorrow if you didn't think of it for two whole days. Now—two days; in five more years, a week. In ten years he'd be babbling to the man next to him at the bar about "My dear, dead wife." Men did that. They pulled things shamelessly from the odor of sweet lavender and waved them in the smell of beer.

He bumped blindly into a figure.

"Why in the name of hell don't you look where you're going?" the man said savagely.

"Sorry," said Tregan.

When would some person bumped into say something different? The pawn to king's fourth. Said the bumpee to the bumper—

"Y'd ought to be—wandering along asleep," the man was saying.

The man was right. He did moon along sometimes. Here he was, three blocks from the office. Yet he couldn't remember having crossed any of the crossings. Probably the way he would end—walk under a car—a Ford at that without doubt. And maybe soon—he felt that something was going to

happen. He dissected his alarm. An atavistic remnant, he decided. Fear at the unknown—and the unknown was the basis of his discontent. He was well-off—the job was decent—the town was good—what did he want, anyhow?

He turned into a restaurant. He realized that it was dirty—a truck-drivers' hangout. Joan had seen him in one of these places once. She had spoken at length about germs, diseases, contagious ills. He had promised not to eat in them any more.

"Dog with onion and mustard. No chili," he said.

The man in the filthy apron sliced a frankfurter. He did it easily. He drew the knife rapidly in a series of staggered cross-strokes, then flattened the sausage on the slab of steel in the window. The steam rose with sibilant sounds.

"Chili?" the man asked.

"No! Onion and mustard. No chili."

"Oh, no chili."

Dirty apron picked a steaming roll from a hot box and bent over the rites.

"Some guys," he said, making conversation, "like lots of chili."

"Yes," said Tregan. "I don't like chili."

"And you take some guys, they take all they can get."

"Yeah? But I don't like chili."

"Too hot for you?"

"That's it. Too hot."

Tregan munched the sandwich. That, he decided, was the way conversation should be conducted. If he never had to expend any more mental energy than that. He was tired of being smart—a pushbutton spigot ejaculating pseudo-brilliances.

"Corfee?" asked the man.

"Yeah."

"Draw one!"

It was no use going back to the office yet, Tregan decided. He would only stare with loathing at his typewriter and get deeper into the rut of despair. That was the way it used to go. You stared at your typewriter and hated its guts. Then, suddenly, you got up, walked home, threw clothes into a bag and in a few hours you were far away, on a train, steaming somewhere else—anywhere else. He finished his food and left quickly.

He turned down the main street and walked toward the river. The old part of town was run down. Alien smells of bird stores slashed at his nostrils. Aged buildings wore great canvas signs—they looked ashamed, like Victorian dowagers in kitchen aprons. “For Sale” signs all over. Radios blaahing. Phony voices of horribly affected diction. “You aah heawing this prograwm through the Columb-i-aah Broard-cahsting System by curdicy of tha Leetle Go-li-ath Yeast Cake Com-pa-ny, spelt ell, eye, tee, tee—” “—You have just hawd Aw-tew-raw Saw-mawn-daw, violin my-straw of the Boomeh Bran Orchestrah playing Ler Rave doo Diawbul, aw the Dream of Satan. Remembeh, Boomeh Bran is tha lax-er-tive brek-fist food—” “—Miss Orrasetteh will now sing Kisss Myagen by that nevah-failing geen-yus of mew-sic, Victaw Hawbert—” “—for the very little toddehs there ah the very darlingest little dresses in aah subway basement stoah, and the price is so very-very reasonable.”

Sounds ricochetting. Bedlam. Babble. H. G. Wells wrote twenty years ago forecasting the babble machines. Would they put newspapers out of business as Wells had pictured?

Tregan hoped so. Then no more writing bunk—no more doctored interviews, silly stories on brighter business and the glory of the port, ululations to arriving heroes, platitudes of departing orchestra conductors, jazzed-up yarns on holdups, life stories of moronic girl bandits, weepy slush on tiny tots with lost pet dogs, murders cooked and juicily served, involved articles on transit troubles that no one understood (including the reporter who wrote them), hack reports of dizzy annual conventions, unclean excavations into messed-up lives.

And who the devil would care? No newspapers—and then conversation would come back; gossip worth listening to. You never listened to anyone now—everyone had the same machine-fed supply of daily fact.

He paused by a quiet backwater. A seed store—there for three generations—seventy years. He read the names on the tickets—Lobelia, Pandanus, Aspidistra, Dianthus, Gypsophila, Pyrethrum, Weigelia. The words were hypnotic as music—exotic and outlandish like the names of foreign lands. But somewhere there were people who knew those names. It showed you how ignorant you could be. He couldn’t walk in and say: “Give me a Pandanus.”

He was nearing the waterfront. Smells again—fish, vegetables, fruit—smells clashing discordantly.

Someone ought to write a symphony for smells. Hyacinths your first violins, peonies for violas, the odor of boiling jam could be cellos, the whiff

of beer your contrabasses, cigar smoke on a frosty morning would do for trumpets, burning leaves the French horns, soft coal smoke for euphoniums, engraving room acid for piccolos, hospital smells for the flute, new mown hay for the oboe, rotting leaves for the clarinet, stable smells for the English horn, circus stench for bassoon, gasoline smoke for trap drums, boiling honey for chimes, poppies for the cymbals and tar for the kettle-drums.

Tar—there was tar in the air now—the riverfront. It was like Boulogne again—Boulogne and being carried out of the ambulance up the gangplank he couldn't see—and all that was gone now.

Two more blocks—and Negroes.

Children of the sun, someone said. Did they mind being black very much? Perhaps we looked ugly to them. We must—our pasty faces, thin chalky skins. Suppose we had a race still whiter than the whites? Wouldn't they look repulsive to us? Must all be a matter of standard. Never be a Negro and find out. But they must think us ugly with our knife-like noses and thin, ungenerous lips.

His mother's brother had said something about them—years ago after he came back from Nigeria. Uncle Stanley had complained that all white people smelled badly after living among blacks. "How, badly?" he had asked. And then his uncle had explained: "Like urine gone faintly rancid." His aunt had protested in horror. She didn't think a boy should hear such a thing—that was it. Poor Uncle Stan! He had shut up and sunk into a gloomy pining for Africa where people smelled properly.

Tregan stopped by a window. "Mrs. Woody. Royal Restaurant," it said. In the window was a card: "Boosting Jesus." The word "boosting" was plain Gothic but the "Jesus" was in Old English and decorated with flame. That was showing typographical reverence.

He looked at the next window. "Doctor James—Famous Charm Doctor and Masckot Maker."

Impulsively he turned in. A small old Negro woman looked at him coldly.

"Is Doctor James in?"

"No suh. He's gone up the corner fo'while."

"Well, maybe you can give me a charm."

"What sort charm?"

"A dollar charm—that's the limit."

"What you want charm fo' exactly?"

"Just to bring me good luck in general."

She smiled suddenly—then sobered.

"Sho' need a charm, you do. Pow'ful lot er bad luck hangin' oveh you."

"Never mind that. You can't work up above a dollar."

"Ain't tryin' to, mistah. I'se got double-barrel good charm fo' dollar and yo' sho' needs it."

She handed over a small envelope.

"Yo' keeps this in yo' pocket up next yo' haht."

"Thanks," Tregan smiled.

The woman smiled, too.

The afternoon sunshine struck full in his face as he turned back toward the office. The lateral light glowed through the summer transparencies that the girls wore. As the girls walked along the men turned to look at the silhouetted forms beneath the skirts. The girls seemed aware of it as they poured out of the offices of the old financial district.

The buildings bulked portly in their granite stolidity. Flying buttresses like fat men's corporations—representatives of the age of content—Victorian families gorging food and thankful for Solid Business—founding insurance companies that still went on with statement sheets of adamantine impregnability. Simple, honest minds—minds that called for the word "Fidelity" to be carved in two-foot Gothic letters in the marble over that horrible doorway, and then put above it the statue of the dog.

Get it? Fidelity—dog; clog—old faithful? And the poor outmoded dog looked so sheepish.

But perhaps boys marching past on their way to the Civil War had liked it. No doubt all our contemporary smartness will look picayune and baroque some time in the future—perhaps not very far in the future.

The pure grace of line in a hallowed Revolutionary building shot out suddenly as he turned a corner. The transition was so sharp that his eyes welled as from a lash across the face. The white woodwork and red brick rested there like frozen cadenzas from a violin. He worked beside that—and yet he rarely looked at it. Impulsively he turned into the building. Peace dropped like a shroud.

The place seemed deserted. It was too late in the season for many tourists. A guard stood in immobile silhouette against the open rear door—beyond the greenness of the square seemed dazzling.

He turned into the large hall—no one there. He looked at a window.

The unblemished purity of the woodwork held him. The craftsmen of those days knew their design, he thought. The simple ogee was like the repetition of a lullaby. He stood in the quietness a long time. The afternoon sun lengthened still more and the room suddenly seemed to go darker.

He might as well get back to the office now, he decided. He'd have to face that typewriter some time. But he felt better—this place—it was like going to church and getting your sins off your chest. He looked about him. A tall girl stood in a corner. Ash-blonde hair. She was watching him—smiling contemptuously, he thought. He scowled. He'd seen her somewhere—oh, yes, at the symphony concerts, sitting in a box. She always looked so damned superior. He hurried out and returned to the office. The familiar smells and clatter greeted him.

He opened his desk.

Then he picked up clippings that had been stuck in his typewriter and began to rewrite them for the final edition. Almost automatically the time worn *clichés* and well-beloved phrases formed themselves into a pattern.

Sounded a warning—keeping the lid clamped down—a mandate to gangdom—riffraff of other cities—no let-up in vigilance.

It was no use trying to write decently, Tregan thought. You could throw overboard all the old *clichés*, you could forswear them all—mass of data—police threw out a dragnet—tiny tot—burly policeman—subway jam—high-powered bandit car—fled scantily clad—with a dull roar that was heard for blocks—hurled to the sidewalk. You could leave them out if you wished, but just as patiently the poor, perspiring hacks on the copy desk would write them all back in.

Oh, well, what the hell! Let the public have its cordon-throwers and dragnet-casters! After all, people didn't want fact. Fact was standing in front of a loom all day—feeding discs of tin into a stamping press—sweating in front of rolling mills—feeding billions of sheets of paper into a machine that never lagged or felt tired.

Newspaper stories represented illusions to all those millions of machine feeders. They didn't want news as it happened, but as they would like it to happen. It was a daily—

The phone rang, it was the house line. He grabbed it.

"Hello!"

"Why so savage?"

"Oh, hello, Joan. I thought it was—someone else—I was just talking on a story."

"I'm just in off one. Don't forget we're going to Ham's to-night."

"Are we? I forgot. But if you say so, it's all right. Shall we eat up the street—six-thirty?"

"Six-thirty. All right, sweet."

He bent again over the machine. He'd have to hurry. The lines leaped on the paper. Honeyed encomiums of the District Attorney's office accumulated in the staccato stereotyped phrases—neat, orderly, stabbing. The powers that were would recognize it and nurse it warmly. He tore out the last sheet and handed them to the little tired-looking man.

Tregan turned and hurried to the street. The evening air was muggy.

The shoplights glowed as he hurried along. A jeweller's. His eye caught a card advertising engagement rings. Each had a different name. As he went by his retina recorded: "Elite, $200; Girl O' My Heart, $175; Sweetheart, $150."

Putting sex appeal in rings. Imagine buying one and taking it to Joan. "Joan," he'd say, "I've brought you Girl O' My Heart!"

He was still smiling as he turned in the restaurant—cleanly bare-armed waitresses in cross-stitched blouses—the quick monotone of conversation. He saw Joan in a corner. A tall man was talking to her animatedly.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Tregan," the man said. He put the accent on the last syllable.

Tregan made an appropriate noise.

"I saw Mr. Tregan the other day," the man was saying archly to Joan. "You will never guess what he was doing!"

"What?" asked Joan.

"He was een a cemetery, lookink at thee graves. Ha, ha! A droll oh-cupation for Mr. Tregan."

Tregan sulked. What the devil was he supposed to do while all this went on. Dance a Highland Fling? And what the devil was the man's name?

"But I will leave you weeth regrets."

He bowed. Tregan sat.

"Who the devil was that?"

"A friend of yours."

"No friend of mine," protested Tregan.

"Well, you introduced me to him."

There was a long silence. Penitence welled in Tregan.

"Let's not quarrel, Joan."

"I'm not. I just wonder what pleasure we get out of digging at each other's nerves."

"I didn't mean to."

"I know, Tree, but you did it—so did I."

He smiled. "It was my fault. Was I late getting here?"

"Damn tootin'."

"Forgive me—and my rotten disposition! I had a story to write."

"Eat something, boy. You look tired."

He smiled. "I feel somewhat lousy. This damn town!"

"I know. You don't have to tell me."

"I guess I don't feel so good."

"Well, eat something, boy."

The smoke swirled. Tregan ate absently. Food, he thought, that was the enemy of discontent. You couldn't be blue while you were chewing. That ought to be a song—you'll never be blue as long as you chew—cows always chewed—always contented, cows. Maybe that's why people chewed gum. He'd have to try it some day. He never had.

He came up from the idle whirlpool of thought. Joan was talking.

"Feeling better now?"

He smiled without answering.

"I could hug you when you smile like that," she said.

"Please! Not here!"

"What were you doing in a cemetery?"

He frowned—and then smiled again quickly.

"An old Quaker cemetery—I don't know." He searched for words. "I've been a little restless lately—got to walking around old dumps and things—trying to get away from myself, maybe. It was quiet there. I ever tell you I am supposed to be a Quaker?"

She sat quietly.

"There was an old brick wall running round the place—right in the city center—but unexpectedly peaceful—sort of calm. Some of the old Revolutionary lads' graves are over in one corner—national heroes—ivy runs all over the flat stones. I was trying to think out something—like—I don't know. The sun was slanting over the houses and smoke was eddying up from somewhere. I felt like something—I don't know what to call it—like going under a sort of ether. Oh, hell! I don't know what I'm getting at!"

"I understand, Tree."

“No, you don’t.”

“I do, though.”

“You can’t. I don’t know what I’m talking about myself.”

“I know what it all means better than you do. Come on—it’s getting late.”

“Nobody will know,” Tregan was saying.

16

THE HAMILTON HEGERMANS lived in an old brownstone mansion in what once had been a smart section of the city. But since the McKinley era the slums had come creeping up, block by block. Now the sidewalks resounded with the clatter of Yiddish oftener than with English and the alleyways in the rear echoed at night to Negro boisterousness. But though the "nice people" had moved away years before, the Hegermans stayed on in the unpainted house behind the ugly wrought-iron palings. They were childless but happy.

There are Hegermans in every large city. By a freak of ill luck—generally by losing a good deal of money—they are jolted out of their own circle and sometimes out of their own generation. Without the means to travel in circles they once knew they find solace with younger people—the irresponsible moderns who thumb brave noses at plutocracy and walk at times in lovingly linked arms with poverty.

Most of Hamilton Hegerman's life had been spent in Europe. He had worn his grey hat at Ascot. His one weakness had been logic. Logic told him that one of his ponies must come in first some day by law of average. But the law didn't work. Once, it is true, one of his stable came in a close second in the Manchester Handicap—but Hamilton Hegerman played them only on the nose like a true sportsman.

After his money was gone Hamilton used logic—utilizing his wife's money. Logic told him that thirteen must come up ultimately on the roulette table at Monte Carlo. Logic flounced its skirt in his face again.

With the money melting away his wife stepped in. That day the roulette table had blasted his last faith in the sanity of the multiplication table. He seemed like someone dead.

She bustled about the hotel, packed trunks, bought tickets on the express, called a fiacre, got her husband into it and drove away. From that time on the little bird-like woman had taken complete charge of her great angular husband. She decided to bring him home, to pick up the broken ends of life in sane America. She moved into the great brownstone house that her uncle had left her—one of the few remaining possessions.

At first Hamilton Hegerman protested mildly. He didn't like America—he felt it was uncouth and ghastly. He sighed for the days of the past decade. In a flurry of renewed confidence after the war he began buying Russian

roubles. The rouble crashed. He turned to German marks. Logic told you that the mark couldn't go any lower. Some day they would be worth millions again—and the Hegermans could go back to London, Paris, Cap d'Antibes. Once again magically there would be beautiful women with tiny corseted waists who swung lightly on your arm while the Hungarian orchestra played "The Pink Lady" waltz.

But the mark crashed too. Logic was defied once more. Defeated beyond all recovery Hamilton Hegerman went into exile. He lost all resistance to his tiny wife. She chivvied him patiently and rescued the very last of the money. He retired to his study—sat there among the old photos, the one of himself sitting next to Prince Gustave at the shooting party, the one taken aboard Sir Ian's yacht off Majorca. Listlessly he sprawled in the big chair amid the dusty litter of beautifully engraved Russian roubles—the stacks of paper marks. In despair he wrote to an erudite magazine calling attention to the need for stabilization of world currency.

And then it happened. Like a stone thrown into the millpond of his dull despair there came a letter from the magazine which began: "Enclosed please find check—" The publication had bought his random article that he had ground out in a futile protest against a fate that wouldn't recognize the laws of logic.

Hamilton Hegerman was stunned. He gazed for hours at the piece of paper with the figures stamped in by a perforating machine. It was the first money he had ever earned in his life. In a child-like daze he carried it to his wife. With a rare intuition she took it seriously.

He went back to his study and sat in bewilderment. Lots of quite decent fellows became authors. There had been what's-his-name at that house party at Lord Hurlham's. His name escaped him, but everyone had seemed to rate him pretty highly.

He talked of it with Nancy Hegerman—the idea of being an author. She grasped at the pose and her husband wore it. Not a bad idea—retired gentleman sitting in his old library leaving a legacy of written wisdom. She played up to the conceit. He began to walk to the dusty room with a less vacant air. He sent more articles to the austere journal which seemed to find his erudition adequately tempered with gentility. In time his somewhat pedantic style and his undoubtedly comprehensive knowledge of European politics, statesmen and the interminable complications of minor royalties and related nobility, gained him no small favor. Finally he was asked to become the dusty magazine's literary critic. He trembled with awe at his good fortune. He took his position with seriousness; but he never received a monthly check—small as it was—without experiencing an almost child-like

amazement that anyone in this world should pay Hamilton Deems Hegerman for doing something.

It was Nancy Hegerman who began the collection of young people. One day a young man from the magazine called to leave some proofs. He stayed for dinner. His due respect for the superior position of Hamilton, coupled with a genuine interest in European matters which were a closed book to him and a transparent matter to the Hegermans, made the evening an unusually agitated one for the old brownstone house. Nancy spent the time watching Hamilton, who glowed and expanded under the unusual stimulus of an audience. For the first time in his life someone was listening to him with respect for his words.

Nancy cared little about European politics, but she cared for the big ungainly man and in her quiet way managed to get additional audiences. Where she got them from was always a mystery. But one person brought another until the old house became a teeming center of erratic life.

Perhaps their own childlessness fostered the Hegermans' affection for the young people. They blithely discovered a new genius every week. The only reason that the world failed to accept the geniuses, the Hegermans felt, was because of the calloused indifference of a blind public and the lack of a little luck. Hamilton Hegerman would always encourage the young hopefuls by reminding them of his own great luck.

He would pat the despairing young hopeful on the shoulder with his great hand.

"For forty-five years of my life I got nowhere," he would say. "And then, suddenly, I find myself appointed to my present portfolio. And what brought it all about? Just my luck turned at last—just luck. And that's all you need—just a turn of luck that will let people see your great talent."

Since there is nothing that youth adores more—even the present crop of sophomore cynics—than someone who will take its ambitions seriously, it is little wonder that within a year the Hegermans were playing intellectual wet nurse to half the music students and young painters in the city. Nancy never understood one quarter of the matters they talked about so belligerently. She was never quite sure whether the young man weeping about Brancusi and Mestrovic was a musician or a sculptor—but she knew the right kind of comforting words to say.

And for these "very nice children" the Hegermans would go to the telephone and in faultless accents call up "such a very nice bootlegger" who would bring them the mixture of water, juniper juice and de-denatured alcohol that went (for want of honest name) under the title of gin.

In that noisy backwater Hamilton Hegerman ruled contentedly like a benign Jove over a strange and new generation that loved him for his hospitality and accepted his literary status as seriously as he accepted their own ambitions.

When Joan and Tregan arrived at the old house the great high-ceilinged front room was alive with a hemorrhage of conversation. Hamilton, face beaming contentedly, greeted them.

"Nice to see you, children!"

"Oh, good! You have a fire," said Joan. "I'm almost frozen. These late September evenings!"

She walked to the great open hearth in her usual oblivious way.

"You know everyone, don't you, Tree?" Hamilton asked, waving a great generous hand.

"Sure!"

He didn't, but he disliked the trouble of trying to remember people's names. He drifted to a corner lounge in the shadow.

The usual *agitato* racket of words swirled about. It was as if the conversations were being pumped into the great room so that it filled up, foot by foot, until it rose above your head and you must either drown in the six-foot layer or swim in it. Tregan decided to drown. He watched a boy and girl toasting marshmallows by the fireplace. He tried to remember the girl's name. He found he couldn't. She had studied ballet dancing for three years and then had floated into the stock pony chorus of a big vaudeville house where, in all probability, she would stay a part of the thirty-two-legged centipede that wheeled and kicked on the stage until she began to show signs of age. Someone had told him about it—probably she had. The boy beside her was studying violin—Jascha or something like that. It didn't matter much. Tregan laughed to himself.

"Why do you laugh?"

He started at the sound of the voice from beside him. It was a feminine one—heavily accented.

"Sorry, I didn't see you there. I guess my eyes aren't used to the darkness yet."

He listened to the swirl of talk. Rising stridently above the rest was the voice of Jasper Holbman, pontificating on his usual topic of Communism. Tregan turned back to the girl beside him.

“What’s your name?”

“Olivia Mendoza.”

“Spanish?”

“No. From Venezuela.”

There was a long silence. Then:

“Are you studying here?”

“No.”

Again that long silence.

“Aren’t you doing anything in this country?”

“No, just visiting.”

“Who?”

“Not anyone. Just visiting the country.”

His eyes were becoming used to the darkness. He could see the profile of the girl as she sat there—the face was not particularly pretty—it was almost displeasing. He watched her quietly. Not the shadow of an emotion crossed her countenance. He wondered how long she could sit in that absolute immobility. The minutes ticked away. He grew tired of waiting.

“What are you thinking of?” he said, finally.

“Nothing,” she answered. He was surprised how her face changed as she spoke. The sudden animation transmuted it into a thing of flashing beauty. Then it dropped back again into blank repose.

“What do you think of all these people?”

“They are being very noisy.”

He realized that they were noisy, as one invariably became noisy at the Hegermans. One became infused with a sort of discontented nervous energy.

He listened to Holbman’s ranting.

“Social system!” he was echoing. “Social system! Why, I could take a sack of sawdust and a hunk of rope and make a better social system than we’ve got to-day. And why does it exist? No reason at all. It wasn’t a conscious selection. Our present social system just happened. It evolved by following the line of least resistance—which means that the richest and strongest got its own way all the time.

“It’s ridiculous! If a person had ten children do you think he’d give nine of them barely enough food to keep them alive just so that the tenth could have so much that it could gorge on it, waste it, push it on the floor, walk in it, wallow in it, waste it?

"Yet that's just what our social system does. It starves ninety percent of us just so that the other tenth can wallow in the cream of the earth's output."

"Who said that?" put in Tregan.

"I say so!"

"Yes—and so did Bernard Shaw in his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. You might at least give him a credit line. We've read it, too."

Holbman laughed superiorly.

"Mr. Tregan protests because the original idea isn't mine. But because it isn't, doesn't make it any the less true. It is as true when I say it as it was when Shaw said it. God doesn't touch Shaw's words with a special blanket of truth that extends to no one else.

"The trouble with you, Tregan, is that you have a puny mind that is too small to recognize its own limitations. You still go on wishing to be a creator. I am much wiser. I realize that I can't be a creator, but that I can at least be a re-creator. And, I am content to be what I am. I humbly adopt any man's ideas—Shaw's or Lenin's—if my judgment tells me they are better than my own.

"You go on thinking blindly—searching for originality. Therefore you become the white trash of the social order. You sell your brains down the river to a capitalist. And what does Penworthy do with the money you earn? He founds a school of music just for the convenience of forty or fifty wise parasites like Jascha, so that they, who never have and never will contribute one jot of productive work to the world, can live in ease and comfort.

"Your earnings pay for that. They pay for the sweet young females with a voice or a yen to pluck the harp—who ultimately will form a nice seraglio for the highly strung maestros of music.

"Each lassie will get the same line. 'My dear,' says the instructor, 'your voice is flawless, your technique is beyond criticism; but you have no soul.' Then he follows that up by explaining how she can get a soul. She must love—ah, God, how she must love! In fact, it is imperative that she have a love affair with someone immediately. It must, of course, be with someone who can give her *hommage sympathique* and artistic tenderness. And those men are hard to find—unless . . . Yes, he has it! For this pupil he himself, the great maestro, in person and not a moving picture, will go to the trouble of providing her with a soul!

"And you, you poor sap, are paying for all that. And what do you think of that?"

"I think it's the same kind of rot you always talk, Holbman."

"Rot, defined by Mr. Tregan, is anything that doesn't coincide with his own ideas. Listen, I'll tell you something. Last week a working girl, wearing a thin dress, cotton stockings, three dollar shoes and all the rest of the paraphernalia of the downtrodden, fainted in the street. She was carried into the school endowed by Penworthy. The oh-so-solicitous ladies there gathered around, one of them the daughter of your great industrial chief. She called a doctor. He revived the girl; discovered that she was merely suffering from a bad case of malnutrition. The great ladies were thrilled to play the role of upper classes. They decided to do something.

" 'We shall see you have work soon,' your great lady told her.

" 'But I am working,' the girl comes back. 'You see I only get nine dollars a week and that doesn't keep you alive very well.'

" 'A terrible thing!' says milady. 'And where do you work?'

" 'At the Penworthy Publishing Company,' comes back the girl.

"Now laugh that one off, you weak-spined wage slave!"

Tregan made no answer. He disliked Holbman's glibness, his torrents of half-substantiated arguments that silenced opposition but which never convinced.

"You're all wrong," Jascha was saying from before the fire. "You have a freshman's conception of life. To understand life you must be intelligent—intelligent as I am—understand that life is so short that everything in it is futile, even the process of living. And then you learn to do nothing at all with an air of supreme content. You must be all-wise like that, or else you must be perfectly normal like Tregan. To be halfway as you are is to be lost irrevocably.

"There are few sociological needs existing, really. People tell you that what we need is this and what we need is that. All that a cigar needs is a good five-cent country to smoke it, that's all. Now—"

Tregan tore his mind away. It was always the same. Week after week the talking at Hegermans', the semi-clever chatter and argument, and now the growing discontent—

Hamilton was standing by.

"Would you like a drink, Tregan?"

Tregan took the glass. The conversations eddied like the blankets of smoke you sometimes saw in layers over late night copy desks.

"—you take stick cinnamon and sugar, boil them with orange juice and a dash of lemon—his recording of the Bolero is lousy, a regular organ-grinder's effect—no, I don't think it is—we were scared to beat hell for a

little while but two days later she called me and said—just round the corner from the Dôme on Raspail—"

Tregan shook his head as if he would throw off the conversation like a retriever shakes the water from its coat. It was no good—the conversation stayed there. He drank.

He was drinking when he saw Joan before him.

"Don't drink too much."

What was too much? He couldn't find the answer to that.

"Sure, Hamilton, I'll have just a doch an' dorris with you." He was saying that. The smell of toasted marshmallows was in the air. Holbman was talking to the Spanish girl. She was listening shyly.

A swine, Holbman. Why did he come here? No, he had a right here. Why did Tregan himself come here? Same shiny little minds—same shiny little platitudes.

"We'd better go, boy!"

Joan! That was right. He did feel a little sick. Perhaps the marshmallows. He was so tired of being sober—it was peace to be drunk. Then you never told lies.

Cold! They were outside. The moon followed them over the housetops.

"I can't do anything about it, Joan."

"About what?"

What was it he couldn't do anything about? He'd forgotten. No. He had it—about things, that was it.

"About things, Joan. About you—and me—and moonlight like this. And being half-lit I suppose, and longing for some sort of peace that I never get. A sort of cosmic itch that I can't scratch. Do you mind my telling you?"

"No, boy. Tell mother and get it off your chest."

What was he answering to that? He couldn't make out what he was saying. He was almost home.

He paused with the doorkey in his hand.

"Did I say goodnight to Hamilton?"

"Yes. Sure you did. Open the door."

He had opened it, it seemed. The cold air had sobered him. There was music from the apartment above.

"Klangelstein's giving a party," he commented. "Let's go up."

It would be fun to drop in. Joan was saying no, but suddenly they were there. He was standing in the door, blinking at the light. Someone was playing the piano—Bach—sure, firm fingering. The themes chased each other madly. He stared. It was the girl with the ash-blonde hair. He felt angry—it was silly to keep running into her.

He crossed the room and went to the kitchen.

"Tregan—meet Dr. Stanislaus!"

The conductor. Stanislaus was a good egg.

"Is it deep conversation here?" Tregan asked.

"We were just deciding which girl we would pick for the night if we had free choice."

Girls—for the night. Hell! "I'd take a drink instead."

"Good—possibly that's the wise answer."

And there was Grauman—busy.

"Hi, Grauman!"

"Ah, Tregan! I am conducting an experiment in mixing."

Damn her—why did that blonde go through life coolly detached? Such a noise—and the violin was sounding like threads of treacle. Klangelstein was playing. And the girl was looking at him—she felt pity for him because he was a mess—that was it. He'd show her. He'd walk out as straight as his limp would let him. But he couldn't see. Everyone had left him—he was all alone—all alone in a vast and comfortless world. He didn't want to be born—not to be cold and alone.

"But you're not alone, boy—I'm with you."

Ah—so he must have said that out loud. That was Joan's voice. He knew that—he'd been talking. Couldn't fool a quick brain, my boy. It was dark—so dark.

Blue bolts of pain shot through his head—it was cruel.

"Take this."

Joan was standing there with coffee—and it was morning. He looked at her—the pajama sleeves rolled up—she looked so small in his pajamas.

"You stayed here?"

"Someone had to stay—to take care of you. You were bad."

"I did get an edge on."

"How's the cosmic itch?"

“What’s that?”

“I don’t know. You were talking about it last night.”

“Oh. Entirely subordinated to a Godawful hangover.”

The coffee was good. It made him feel better—and a little sleepy. He would sleep—if he could.

Joan was shaking his shoulder. She was dressed. He must have slept.

“I’ve got to go to work, boy. Time you got up.”

“I’m never going to work any more—I’m through with that job.”

“Don’t be silly and childish.”

“I’m not. I’m not going to work to-day or to-morrow or the day after or the day after or the day after that. I’ve quit.”

“When did you?”

“Right now!”

“Don’t be silly. I’ve started the bath. If you don’t get up it’ll run over.”

He heard the door bang. He fell asleep again. With a jump he sprang out of bed. The tub wasn’t full. He had only slept about one minute—and yet he had been fully asleep.

He put his foot tentatively in the water—said “damn” explosively and pulled it out. He did that regularly nearly every morning of his life.

He bathed and dressed and went to the office. And that day was like the next—and the next—and the next.

17

WOMEN were wondering how small these Impress Eugénie hats could be (and still remain not too ultra) and with a great deal of newspaper publicity Viscount Milton, only son of Earl and Countess Fitzwilliam, reached his majority and attended a celebration at which gathered 40,000 and at which ale brewed the day he was born was consumed.

With headlong haste people moved from the coast of El Salvador where lay British and American warships sent there to protect foreign interests during disturbances ashore; people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of those wounded and injured in a Russian train wreck who had been pulled from the debris, laid neatly on a nearby track, where a second train had ploughed over them, cutting them to bits.

Three Japanese sappers, Takeji Eshita, Jo Kitakawa and Inosuke Sakue, with notable courage, fastened themselves to a ten-foot bomb and jumped into the barbed wire entanglements before the Chinese army at Miaohangchen, thereby removing much barbed wire, and themselves, from the scene; a native of Palermo, styled a "red", wounded Guiseppe Gentile, Italian consul, in Paris; in the interests of civilization men with the latest weapons of warfare moved into Mukden, rough-handling Culon B. Chamberlin, U. S. consul at Harbin and suppressing natives. A Japanese apology was sent for the shoving-about of Mr. Chamberlin but no apology was made to several thousand native widows who mourned for the suppressed.

Ships' guns spoke as sailors bombarded hardy souls of all nationalities who tried to land alcoholic drinkables on the thirsting shores of the United States. Lifeless bodies lay about Luebeck, Germany, where two professors made a laboratory mistake which resulted in feeding poison germs to 68 children.

Burning against injustice, mozos rose in revolt throughout the foreign-owned banana-lands about Tela, in Honduras, and were promptly named "rebels"; the world seemed to be going to pot in Spain, where Monarchists and Catholics proceeded to smack, punch, kick and shoot each other; strikers hoped against hope in Germany; several experts delivered themselves of the opinion that prosperity was just around the corner, while a goodly number of people spent many hours becoming expert in making a little spool climb a string in a game named yo-yo.

In Geneva a few brave men delivered a report which refused to admit that Japan was expressing brotherly love in her occupation of Manchuria, while the world blithely whistled something about a Spanish-American peanut-vender and picturing a penthouse way up in the sky, and decided that this man, Ed Wynn, was “a card”.

18

THE first leaves of the maples were dropping and lying ochre-colored on the grass outside Benton's studio. Inside, Tregan watched the girl. It was silly, he thought; an inane illogicality of life that kept bringing them together.

The place hummed with talk and the pictures blazed from the walls. It was the same Sunday afternoon talk. There were the same pictures. Or there was a new picture, Benton was saying. He was moving about with imperceptibly quick motions.

"My new Kadar Bela—yes, yes! Marvellous, what? It's called The Ecstatic Mule! Yes, yes! Of course Perfect title!"

Benton had such a private joke on life. He kidded it, talking in exclamation points, making up sublimely ridiculous names for the gay irresponsibility of his modern canvases.

The house danced to Benton's talk—it danced to the framed blobs of color that covered the walls. And outside the first leaves were dropping, patiently, disregarding tea parties and pictures. And in the corner the girl with ash-blonde hair sat—she, too, seemed immutable as the seasons, and as detached.

"Ah, Tregan, my boy, my boy! I hung out the British flag—especially for you! Yes, yes! Pass the tea!"

Such a joke Benton played on life. He always hung out the flags of all nations at noon every Sunday. Then, no matter what nationality walked in, he always had the flag out "especially for you".

"Rather peculiar tea," someone was saying.

"Popoff *chi*," Benton beamed. "Very rare."

Tregan grinned.

"It's time you were exposed," he said to Benton.

The little man danced his effervescent jig and grinned.

"Exposed, my boy! Exposed!"

"He always says it's Popoff *chi*," Tregan told them. "And everyone takes it with awe, drinks it silently, and thinks how horrible it is. I believe it's his biggest private joke on life. He gathers weeds in the fields of weekdays, dries them in the sun, and brews it on Sunday as Popoff *chi*. He's merely waiting for the day when some honest soul will tell him how terrible it is."

And he spoke and they laughed—and the girl sat in the corner. She did not smile.

Could nothing he did stab into her self-complacent isolation? Her eyes were blue—such an ordinary combination, blonde hair and blue eyes. He offered her tea and she nodded. And that was all. He looked from the window and the maples bowed in the wind and shook down sere leaves. The people talked.

"She wanted a mosquito netting," the woman was saying. Her voice was full and resonant and pleasant. "She wanted a netting and she stopped at the desk and said: '*Je désire un mousquetaire, très fort, et très grand, dans mon lit ce soir*.' And the manager said—ah, those gallant Gauls!—he said: '*Madame, pourquoi pas trois?*' "

Tregan felt suddenly impatient—at the place, at the pictures, at Benton, at the woman, at the people laughing so evenly, most of all at himself. He left and pulled a bathing suit from a pocket flap of his car, climbed the fence and cut through the underbrush. It would be peaceful, swimming in the quarry.

The smell of autumn was in the air. He hurried through the weeds. His lame foot caught in the underbrush and he slid downhill to the path, tripped and fell on his hands and knees.

"Are you hurt?" It was the girl—again.

"Oh, you," he said. "I—I lost balance." He brushed off his clothes. It was too unreasonable of her to be everywhere he went.

"You should be careful running around with—" The girl paused and stopped.

"It's all right," he said. "With the lame foot, you mean."

She said nothing. They walked down the path together. He was sorry he'd slashed at her with words.

"Forgive me," he said. "I merely mean that it is silly and irritating to keep on running into each other all over and then—"

He stopped. There wasn't anything to say.

"I just got rather bored up there and I felt it would be pretty good to swim."

"Yes," she said. "I cut out the other way. Are you a good swimmer?"

Their feet rattled on the stones.

"If I say no, it's a pose. If I say yes, it's egocentric. What shall I say?"

"The water looks nice," she said, finally.

They climbed to the dressing rooms—wooden boxes on the hillside. He hurried into his suit. He wanted to be in the water first. There was no limp when he swam.

The water was first warm as he dove, and then, underneath, cold. He went down into the green—savagely. So cold—it caught your heart. He fought up again, paddled to the raft, and sat. The sun sent a honeyed smell up from the damp wood of the float, which rocked gently in the ripples he had made. She walked down the path, waded into the water slowly, swam out beside him. They sat without speaking. The upper part of her leg was white and hairless. He watched the drops of water run off as the skin dried in the sun. Then there were only four drops left, each sitting complete and smug, each with its own highlight and shadow. Her leg was very smooth.

"You know, it's silly of us to be this way," he said.

"What way?"

"I mean, dumbly antagonistic."

"You know, this quarry is in a book," she said.

"I know. In Whoosis—I forget the title. I started to read it. It was silly." He laughed. "He is all out of date. He had his heroine undress—and she wore all the wrong things."

"Yes," she answered. Her mind shot off obliquely again. "I always thought this would be the place to do the *Walküre*. The maidens up on the rocks, there. The fire rock up there. The orchestra down on the path."

"And the audience in boats," he said. "Why do you dislike me—or why do I dislike you?"

"Do we?"

"Answering questions with questions. But it is as if we're not human beings but members of two strange tribes. We ought to be civilized, I suppose. At least if we must meet we should be introduced. My name is—"

"I know," she said. "You're Llewellyn Tregan. I'm Alice Johns."

"Any relation to the corporation counsel man who—" He stopped.

"My father."

"Oh, then we *are* different tribes. No wonder you made me angry."

"Why—what's—"

"Oh, you're such a damn aristocrat. I don't mean in actions—mostly in appearance. That irritates us—the wage-earners, I mean."

"I don't think so."

"I insist. You're typically aristocratic; blonde, a little washed out in pigmentation, slender-nosed and bred a little too fine, tall and white-skinned. Your eyes—I've noticed them. They're funny. Blue, and black right in the center of the iris. And the black part expands and contracts rapidly according to the amount of light that strikes it."

She slipped into the water. He watched her arms flash, slow and white, in the sun. She circled and came back, sat on the raft, pulled off the bathing cap and shook her hair out. She laughed. It was the first time he'd heard her laugh.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I don't know," she said. "I was wondering why myself. I think you're a bit of a patrician, too. And it's warm in the sun—and the water is cool—and you think so nicely and speak so nastily—and you're all upside down—and we ought to be getting back."

"Yes," he said. "It's getting late. Are you staying late here?"

"No, driving home. Can I give you a lift?"

"I don't ride in anything as bloody ostentatious as the machine you'd drive. Will you go riding with me some day?"

"Car, you mean? Or horse—can you ride?"

"Horses? Sure, I ride well—will you ride with me?"

"Wednesday—or Friday I—"

"God no! I'm one of the working press. Sunday's my only day off. I do skim out for an afternoon sometimes."

"Next Sunday, then, working press."

"Next Sunday, patrician!"

They slipped into the water and swam to the bank.

Patrician, he was thinking. What did that mean? Once there had been Dr. Rex's school for the Sons British Gentlemen. What did that make him? He didn't hate this girl, he decided. He merely resented the fact that she represented the wealthy class while he, now, had become a worker. Was it sane to resent his own capacity to earn a living? To hell, he thought with all that class rot.

As they walked up the path Benton bustled out.

"Come, come! Yardell's here. The playwright! Come and meet him!" He waved and danced his motionless jig. His white hair made him look like a daisy in the wind.

"He caught a lion," Tregan grinned. "We'll fall flat when we meet him."

Then they were shaking hands with the man in brown tweed.

"We were going to swoon in awe at meeting you," Tregan grinned.

"Quite a compliment from lovers," the man said.

Tregan looked at Alice.

"But we're not—not lovers, I mean," he said. "In fact, we're bitter enemies—from different tribes."

"Hating each other for being strange," the girl said.

"Same thing," Yardell said, gravely. He looked at Alice and smiled. "Love, hate, both the same. Merely different ends of the same emotion. Plus or minus quantity. You'll find out—especially if you try to go on hating. Watch yourselves."

Tregan grinned again.

"Don't need to," he said. Then to Alice: "I'm running along."

"Till Sunday, then, newspaperman," Alice said.

"I won't forget—if you won't," answered Tregan.

"Ah," said Yardell, softly.

A yellow leaf twirled and spun in the late sunlight.

19

IN the weeks that followed Tregan rode many times with Alice Johns. To say that he found happiness in their contact would not be true. The girl puzzled him. Her reactions to his moods and manners were disconcerting in their cool sanity and he found himself unable to talk to her at any length. This pricked his carefully protected vanity and made him irritable.

Beneath the surface of their acquaintance there still lay his new uneasiness, a restless eddy that drew contentment into its vortex and submerged it.

On his first visit to call on her Tregan stood in the dark-panelled library looking out over a veranda. Beyond the portico was the lawn, bordered with the kind of artificially bred conifers that one sees on such lawns. The green stretch reached out under half-nude elms to a high granite wall. He turned as the girl came down the staircase.

Her jodphurs and long riding coat made her appear taller than usual; her ash hair seemed to glow coldly where it showed under the green riding hat. Tregan caught the picture, as if all action were suspended. She stood there, smiling, holding out her hand.

"Your people are lousy with money!" He had to say it. In some curious way he was striking at himself. The smile dropped from the girl's face quickly, like the flashing of an ax in high sunlight.

"Can't you help being class-conscious?" she said. The phrase hung in that curious way as if suspended in the air. He felt he would remember the words forever. The tone made him feel as if he were a specimen under a magnifying glass and that she had remarked casually upon an established commonplace.

They rode that day under the shower of leaves that slanted down to the bridle-path. Tregan, in his mood, half expected that the girl would reach out and offer comfort. That she did not, set him off balance. She seemed a complete entity—a self-contained unit within the castle walls of her coolness.

It was a curious, antagonistic friendship, one hard to understand. Certainly Tregan could not understand, and if Alice did she made no sign. Tregan incessantly punctured the happy moments with poniard-point remarks that should have stabbed the girl from her self-sufficient

completeness. Alice, for her part, retained the calm that drove Tregan to a bitter desperation.

It was as if the happier moments of their meetings were a fragile cup which Tregan found himself unworthy to hold and which he crushed in his hands because he thought himself better fitted for a grosser earthenware.

When they were happy it was because Tregan was carried outside himself by externals. Then there was a companionship in which time did not exist.

There was the day they walked along a half-forgotten valley. The dirt road, deeply rutted, wound tortuously with the contours of a creek that leaped madly over flat rocks. The leaves of autumn flicked down from the trees over their heads. Tregan, far away in his thoughts, smiled. He told the girl of his first autumn in America, of the day he called "Danaë! Danaë!" and of his fear that someone had heard.

"I never thought about America like that," said Alice.

"Like what?"

"In the way you picture it. It sounds so strange and mysterious and glamorous."

"Well, it is."

"Not to us, I don't think. I never thought of it before, but I suppose America must be as thrilling to you people born abroad as France and England are to us. We go abroad and everything is changed. America is a dull tale to us."

"Well, it's just that we don't get autumn like you do here," he said. "I'm used to it now, but I'll never forget the first year. You see, in England it begins to rain and the leaves just plop down from the trees."

"Rather miserable, I should think."

"But it's wonderful if you're born to it. It doesn't always rain. There are summer days when it seems that all the blue in the Mediterranean has blown up to England. The day has no end—it just goes on. We used to go scrambling over tangled country—walking for miles. We'd get home at night—so tired. Coming over the hill we'd see the village below us. The sun would sink in a counterpane of gold—there'd be elms silhouetted like black lace, and far away you'd hear the cowbells. Gives me the shivers to think of it."

Tregan talked of his childhood and they forgot their antagonism and walked deep in the woods, kicking the leaves before them. Tregan almost forgot the fact that his lame foot dragged behind a little. He discovered on

the ground hundreds of small, sweet nuts in curious triangular pods. They staked off claims, areas in which they should work, and fought when either encroached on the other's territory. Their fight became a mad tussle. Before that they had never touched except to shake hands. Tregan was amazed at the girl's strength. She seemed to come out of her calm lethargy for the first time. At last he sank to the carpet of leaves, panting for breath.

"I'd hate to be the man who marries you," he laughed. "You'd beat him to death. I can just imagine him coming home late at night and trying to get away with the old one about being out on a business conference."

"Well, I'm not thinking of getting married. I'm going to write mad music all my life."

The dusk dropped and Tregan lit a fire. They sat by it and talked. Tregan became silent as she told him of her music.

"You don't like my stuff?" she asked, finally.

"I haven't heard enough."

"That's evasion. Why not tell me? It won't influence me."

"Then why do you want to hear?"

"I'm not trying to find out anything about music as much as I'm trying to understand you. You're hard to understand, you know. I don't know whether you're merely a nasty swine or . . ."

"Or what?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "Let's talk about music."

"All right. I only think that your stuff's going nowhere—what I've heard. It's rehashed romanticism. It's been done. Why not work forward instead of backward? Do some real progressive work in the modern idiom."

The girl's smile was as if she were the mother of all wisdom listening to a boy of five.

"Of course, if you laugh at what I think . . ." started Tregan.

"No," she put in quickly. "I never laugh at you, Tregan. I may some day, and then I shall cry, too—and you've never seen me cry."

"Well, you did laugh."

"I know, but I can hardly explain it to you. You see, you talk so blithely without . . ."

"Without knowing anything I'm talking about, I suppose."

"Don't make it hard to explain, Tree. Remember, I let you slam my music, and I'm afraid I'm a little bit serious about it. You say I'm going

back to romanticism and I ought to work in modern idiom—going forward, you call it.

"You see, you're a funny boy, in lots of ways. You have a brain that's sympathetic. It picks up ideas like a sponge. It mops up an incredible amount. But you should try thinking as well as learning.

"The trouble, from my point of view, with the modern music, is that it doesn't say enough. It's hopping around in a magnificent way. It has cut out thousands of gentle graces that are now termed non-essentials. And the blazing trouble with it all is, that not one percent of the people understand it. Now why the devil should I want to work in a way that ninety-nine percent of the people in the world don't feel or understand? What's the use of having an idea and talking about it in an unintelligible language?"

"But that one percent is the only gang worth talking to!"

"Not at all. You've been listening to the scatter-brains who've given you your ideas on the social system. Anyone can understand beauty. The dumbest bunny alive can feel it.

"It's just like writing. Suppose you said to yourself: I'm done with non-essentials. I'm going to cut out all adjectives—"

"I'd probably write better stuff if I did."

"Good! But suppose you had a crazy gang following you who said: 'Look what wonderful stuff that chap Tregan is doing. He cuts out adjectives and clarifies his work. Obviously cutting out things is the secret. We'll all start cutting out verbs, too. What do you say?' So they begin cutting out verbs. You, having a fairly good ear for the language and understanding construction—a specialist, that is—are able to mentally supply the verbs. You can get coherence out of what they write. So you admit the stuff they turn out is fairly understandable. So they go crazy over the stunt. Someone else begins leaving out conjunctions and adverbs and whole sentences, until you have nothing left but nouns.

"And just a string of nouns would give some of you pleasure; some of you, that is, who delight in words for their own beauty and sound. But the world itself, it doesn't get any of this. It wants its sentences back after a while when the novelty of the stunt has worn off. It may sound nice, but how would you express your ideas with nothing but nouns? Would you start to write a book in nouns?"

Tregan laughed gaily. "I'm convinced. Let's start back."

"But you do believe I'm right now, don't you?"

"In a way I do," said Tregan. "At least, it sounds logical. But, you know, people have done that with words. Have you read Gertrude Stein?"

"Yes, some of it. And do you recommend that I write music like she writes poetry?"

"I don't know. It isn't easy, though. I tried it."

"Did you do any?"

"Oh, I got off some sort of crazy stuff that sounded curious. I had to give it up. The darned stuff ran in my mind, I remember:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
July, August, September
And all the rest have thirty-one
Excepting Leap Year.

That was a sample."

"Written all by yourself?"

"Alone, unaided, by Llewellyn Q. Tregan, professor of calligraphy. Professor Tregan, my dear public, scaled great heights. After he mounted to these heights it was his custom to pause for a moment at the rail, and then, with an insouciant wave of his hand to the awed multitude below, he would plunge into a mass of data, barely eluding the grasp of a Bridge policeman who rushed to the spot."

"Ah, Professor, tell me more for my newspaper."

"You want to hear some more?"

"Your public . . ."

"Ah, yes, I must keep faith with my public. Professor Tregan was the great man who discovered that Peggy Eaton was George Washington's illegitimate daughter."

"No!"

"Yes! That's why Andrew Jackson kept her on his cabinet. He wanted to keep her from spilling the news to the public. But she fell in love with Van Buren and spilled the beans after all. That's why George is known as the father of his country and why Van Buren became President. Van Buren never got married. He loved a girl but she had a crush on Queen Victoria.

"Later they had a child who became Benjamin Disraeli. No one ever knew about this except Hector Macdonald. That's why he was banished to China. He told me about it out there in 1884."

"Ah, then you have been to China, Professor?"

"Been in China? Spent the first twenty years of my life there. Born and brought up there, in fact."

"Those Chinese are . . ."

“Damn clever? Oh, yes! But not as much as the Japs. Those Japs . . . tricky fellows. Live on a bowl of rice a day.”

“We should keep them out of California!”

“Right! Lowering the standard of living—that’s what they are. Yellow Peril! But still, not so bad as those Bolsheviki.”

“Ah, yes. Bad lot those Bolsheviki—no morals!”

“Not a bit—and beards. They all have beards in Russia. What Russia needs is a darn good shipload of good, honest, American safety razors.”

“Yes, sir. Give Russia sound business administration and she’d be different. Make Henry Ford or John D. president and they’d put the country on a firm business basis.”

“That’s what I say. Make ’em cut out all this foreign stuff: Moscow Art Theater and ballet dancing and balalaika. Put ’em back on producing! That’s what!”

“Just like Mussolini done with Italy!”

“Exactly! Although that Mussolini’s a bit too chesty at times. But still, he’s made ’em go to work. Put in modern factory laws. Put the country on a producing basis. That’s what the country needed.”

“Ah, then you know Italy, Professor?”

“Hey wallio! Born and brought up there, you might say. Spent the first twenty years of my life there. But you can’t trust ’em—not those Italians. Sicilians worst of all. Knives. That’s what. No good American fists. Can’t understand a manly way of settling a quarrel. That’s them Italians!

“And those Mexicans! Sneaky! What Mexico needs is a good American business administration—instead of lolling around in the sun waiting for mañana and drinking tortillas and things.”

“Ah, then you know Mexico?”

“Know Mexico! Why, I was born and brought up there. Nothing to the place but cactus and things. Put in some good American political systems and the country would brighten up, though. What Mexico needs is some good American foxtrots and less of those spigotty tangoes. Teach ’em athletics, that’s what I say. Give ’em baseball instead of them bullfights and first thing you know you’ll have the country on a sound footing.”

“Yes, and if we don’t get on a firm footing toward home we’ll never get there.”

“That, my dear, is a redundant remark.”

“All right, then, I’m hungry and I have to get home.”

“Let’s stop off at a dog wagon up the pike—where truck drivers eat. We’ll get plates of stew and waffles and sausages and coffee—say, girl, such coffee!”

“I’m afraid I can’t. I have to get back this evening. I’ll tell you what! You stay at our house for dinner!”

A chill evening breeze seemed to sweep down the lane.

“No, I’ve got to be getting down to the office.”

“Why do you hate my home?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t hate it. It’s got me licked.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m sorry, I can’t tell you. Sometimes all the words we have are poor clumsy things. We haven’t got enough in the language to tell you what it all is. I mean that somehow I feel things about your home that there are no words to tell.”

“About me, too?”

“No, you’re all right. Just let it go—I don’t know what I mean myself.”

“Don’t you feel as though we’re human enough? Father has been decent when he’s seen you.”

“Your father—I work for your father. He’s legal adviser to the outfit—he’s a stockholder. The money I make for him goes for the clothes you wear and the food you eat and the books in your library.”

“I’m sorry, Tree. That sort of stuff you’re spouting isn’t worth an answer.”

They walked to the bus line in silence.

Suddenly he was thinking: “How shall I tell Joan about this—about Alice—about me?”

20

IN such friendship as that which existed between Alice and Tregan, there could be but two results: a sudden and deep transition to open love or a swift renunciation of one by the other.

As in his younger days Tregan had gone through his studies with but a quarter of his mind paying attention, so he went almost subconsciously through his daily round. He worked quickly, deftly, well, and yet most of his mind was whirling about thoughts of Alice Johns.

The girl herself was no less mentally aware of Tregan during his absences. Her reaction was more feminine. Quietly she wove her thoughts of him into conscious actions, into the music she played. But her music reflected not him—it reflected him only as her brain transmuted the picture.

Their many meetings never lessened the tense mental struggle between the two. It was as if Tregan, in his bitterness, raised up the barrier between this wide-browed girl and himself while she, retiring into alabastine coolness, only added to the distance between them.

Unable to leave each other alone, unwilling to allow the friendship to march its seemingly inevitable course, they broke suddenly.

They had been on one of Tregan's tours. He knew the backwaters of the city and felt for them a strange affection. He had taken Alice through quiet crooked streets that echoed their footsteps, that were cold in the moonlight. Shadows of fire-escapes staggered up the walls in drunken arabesques. They were old streets. The buildings were old. In the half light one could imagine the high heels of Revolutionary dandies tapping the pavement—Ben Franklin could have trundled his pushcart into view around the next corner without causing surprise. They went on to the waterfront. In the riot of smells they took a creaking ferry.

"A three-cent ocean voyage!" said Tregan.

"Some day we'll . . ."

"We'll what?"

"I was just thinking it would be nice to go to Paris. We'd sit on the Boulevard Montparnasse."

"Me for a Pernod!"

"Yes, at the Coupole."

"It's nicer at the Closerie des Lilas, quieter up there. I used to live on the Rue du Val de Grace just round the corner."

They were quiet.

"It's funny," said Tregan, quietly.

"What is?"

He pointed to the city. Skyscrapers against reflected haze in the sky, illuminated windows in serrated golden designs, water below echoing the lights in a washed sadness, overhead the bridge lights, strung like a necklace of fiery crystal.

"I can see it all," said Tregan. "But I can't do anything about it."

"What do you want to do?"

"God knows! If I knew I'd solve it all. But there's just a necessity for doing something. If you're pleased you can laugh—if you're in pain, you can cry out—but I can't do anything about this and it's greater than pleasure and worse than pain.

"I can see it all—all the shadings and masses—yet I can't paint them, I can't sing them, I can't write them. Words wouldn't mean what I feel when I see all this. Music would. You could put it in music. But I couldn't. I can see it and I can't do anything about it."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing! Get older and older, I suppose. I'll keep on word-jerking all my life, watching people with flowery adjectives making a reputation. I'll sit on the rim of a copy desk pushing a pencil until I'm bald-headed and wrinkled, and lecherous."

She laughed.

"You are merry. And what will I do?"

"You? You're a product of wealth. You'll marry some rich bird and go round the world on your honeymoon."

"And my music?"

"There's no vital necessity in your life for your music. You'll have three babies, forget your music, get a divorce in ten years, pick up your music again, give a sigh over what you did once, and then put it behind you forever."

"You're an omniscient Peter Pan."

"Well, what will you do? You'll marry some dunce from the social register. You're an aristocrat. You're looking like one now—as if you're wondering how in God's name you came to be riding on a three-cent ferry

with a newspaperman. You'll end up with someone like Bud Wardon. You made a goodlooking couple at the opera the other night.

"Some day the girls will come bouncing back in the society department and Dulcy Dean will write in her column:

" 'Just think, the charming Alice Johns is to be married—and to none less than that arbiter of affairs in the younger smart set, Buddie Wardon. Alice's engagement was announced last night at a dinner in the Riding and Drinking Club by her parents, who are, of course, Mr. and Mrs. H. Geoffrey Johns, whose interest in affairs musical and social is simply enormous, and who are the relatives of the old Virginia Johns, who, as you remember, trace descent to the famous John Johns, first vice-Governor of Virginia—not to be confused with the Massachusetts Johns, who are descended from the Demi Johns of Mayflower stock—although both are offshoots of the Buckinghamshire Johns whose ancestor, Sir Bjeremy Bjohns, was Lord Chief Justice in the reign of King Alfred or somebody very ancient.'

"Then she'll go on and give a little of the ancestry of Buddie Wardon, neglecting to mention, of course, his arrests for drunken driving and the servant maid he got into trouble three years ago. . . ."

"Tregan—let's go home as soon as we can."

"Please forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you. I mean, I did, damn it! I don't know why."

She was silent as the ferry drew into the slip. Bells rang and the great paddle wheels churned.

"Put me in a taxi and let me go home alone, Tree—please."

"Don't do that, Alice. I'm sorry."

"It isn't what you've said, Tree—it's just everything—about us. Every time we meet there's this rasping of temperament. You're so blind—and I won't bend my neck—I can't."

"What are you talking about? I don't know what you mean."

"It doesn't matter. We should never have spoken that day we bumped into each other by the quarry. Goodbye."

She half waved to him as the taxi drove away.

21

THE first snow of winter whirled over the pavements and disappeared. Tregan drove his mind harshly to routine work. It continually escaped from the routine and he lashed it back. It wandered again everlastingly to Alice.

He goaded himself with the old two-sided arguments. His objective and subjective selves battered each other.

"You're love-sick like a puppy," the objective would say. "It's silly—sloppy mush—as bad as a lousy Hollywood pap love story! And what about Joan?"

"But nothing else matters," he would answer himself. "I want to see Alice—to talk to her."

"You'll forget her soon."

"I won't. I won't ever forget her."

"Tripe! Men have died and worms have eaten them—but not for love. Any love affair can be put out of your memory in six months. You couldn't keep it alive for six months if you tried."

"I know. But I don't care. I can't help thinking of her."

The circle went on endlessly. Sometimes Tregan felt as though he couldn't live. He jibed and goaded himself from his misery. And the buildings did not fall down, the streets didn't tip up on end, and all editions of the paper came out each day.

At times he was conscious of Joan there in the local room as in a dim background, watching him patiently. One evening she stopped by his desk.

"I'll drop over to your place to-night."

"Anything special?"

"Well, I suppose I'll stick a few buttons on your shirts."

"I couldn't put you to the trouble. Besides, I'm going out."

"Tree. Whatever it is you can call it off. I want to talk to you."

He thought rapidly. The circle whirled. It must come sooner or later.

That evening his buzzer sounded. He let her in. Finally he spoke:

"What is it, Joan?"

"You know, Tree."

He lied.

“Please make it easy for me, Tree. You know that things haven’t been going right.”

“Between us?”

“Of course!”

He waited.

“Do you love me any more, Tree?”

He scoured his mind for truth. He found no answer.

“That means no,” she said. “I know it anyhow. All this conversation’s a gambit I suppose. What is it, Tree? Another woman?”

“No,” he said quickly. “Not in one way.”

She waited, half-smiling.

“Please don’t, Joan,” he said. “That makes it hard. Don’t you see I’m in a rotten position? Here I am, the filthy jilter and trifler with affections and all that. I don’t like it and it’s a rotten position to justify. Give me a minute to think—and I’ll give you honesty.”

She waited.

“It’s just that I think of someone else all the time,” he said. “I can’t get her out of my head.”

“Do you love her?”

“I don’t know. How can I tell? I don’t see her now.”

“Does she love you?”

“No. You see, we never talked about it. There’s nothing between us—I’m being truthful. It isn’t anything like . . . you and me. I just think about her. Stick with me a little while and we’ll be all right. I’ll forget about her.”

“Yes?”

“Why not?”

“How about me—do you love me?”

“Yes . . . I think I do. As far as I can ever define anything in my damned crazy mind I do.”

“You don’t love me, Tree. And you know it.”

“I do. Not like I did once. It’s different from that now. People always get used to each other. When people get married, it’s the same. You grow to take the other one more or less as a matter of course.”

She rose.

“I’m sorry, Tree. It isn’t good enough. You see I want all or nothing at all. You can’t give me the best. I don’t blame you. You’ve been decent and

honest."

"I feel lower than hell."

"Don't do that, boy. Yanking three or four years out of your life is going to be nasty as hell. It'll be tough on me. Even if you lived with someone you hated for three years you couldn't have him go away without feeling a gap where he'd been."

He put his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't go, Joan. I try like hell to be decent. Since I've known you there's been peace—and no chasing around with anyone else. Well, since we're being honest . . . hardly ever with anyone else."

"No, Tree, let's snap it off now while there's something left. We've had the best there is in it. Why wait for love to die with a thousand pinpricks? I don't want it to bleed to death slowly. Being in love doesn't mean we can't use our heads. The best is gone. Let's quit now so that when we think about it later it will all seem pretty pleasant—everything that you and I did."

"You're brave, Joan. Like an army marching with lances slanted forward in the sunlight."

"That's pretty, Tree."

"Please don't mock."

"I'm not, boy. You said a nice thing. It makes a graceful punctuation mark."

They waited.

"Well," she said, "I'll be on my way." She looked at him.

"Please don't stare at me. If you think I'm enjoying this you're crazy."

"You damn fool," she said, and tears welled up. "You don't think it's exactly a picnic for me either, do you?"

She closed the door quietly. He heard her footsteps going down the hall.

22

THE winter deepened and with it Tregan's discontent. Sometimes he saw Joan—passing on crowded streets or at the symphony concerts. At the office they were more than casual. Her eyes were steady and she held her head bravely.

He resigned his job and went to another paper. The sheet was a tabloid. The hours were longer and the work drabber.

In the evenings the round of parties went on. He found in physical fatigue that he thought less about Alice.

Once he heard vaguely that she was abroad. Then one day, he read of her marriage—in Paris, to a musical comedy star. He felt life slipping from under his feet.

One evening a girl smiled at him as he walked home. He raised his hat.

"Your mother's still abroad, isn't she?" she said.

"Yes. I had a letter from Nice."

They walked along in silence. She smiled.

"You don't remember who I am, do you?"

"I'm sorry. I don't."

"I go to your mother's church. You met me there."

"Oh, yes. I feel so stupid forgetting people."

"You remember I was at your mother's home one Sunday. You didn't get back for dinner."

He remembered the brown-haired girl.

"Now I remember," he said. "Your name's Laura, isn't it?"

"Lola."

"That's right."

"Where are you going now?"

"Just cutting off home. I've got a date with a highball."

"Oh!"

"Would you have one?"

"No, thank you. But I'll sit while you drink one."

They walked to Tregan's place. He mixed himself a drink.

"Sure you won't have one?"

"No, thank you."

He drank. The girl's eyes were on him. His mind marched surefootedly. He walked to her and put his arms about her and drew her face toward his.

"You mustn't," she whispered.

He kissed her lips.

"Please," she moaned. "You must let me go."

As she said it her arms were locked tightly about his neck, drawing his head to hers. Later the darkness was like velvet.

He woke in the darkness as she stirred beside him.

"I was asleep?"

"Yes."

Her skin was smooth to his hand reaching out in the darkness.

"You're not sorry, are you?" he asked.

"I don't know. Do you love me?"

"Please don't ask that."

"Why? Don't you love me at all?"

"I'm sorry. Don't ask me things because I'd have to tell you the truth. I like you but I don't love you."

"Oh!"

"Well, you asked me."

"I'm going home."

A week passed before Lola called him. Soon their meetings grew into a routine. The procedure each time was curiously alike. She would always ask:

"Don't you love me, Tree?"

"Don't talk about love, Lola. Aren't you satisfied without words? I don't love anyone. I'm too selfish. I love only myself."

"But you want me."

"Yes. You're beautiful. I'll tell you the truth and say that, at least. Your skin is like silk."

"Why do you want me?"

"I don't know."

"You don't ever call me."

"No. When I don't see you I don't want you."

"Well why do you want me?"

“Oh, don’t ask so many questions! When I see you I want to kiss you and when I kiss you I want you, that’s all. Don’t you want me?”

“No. I’m scared.”

“Of what?”

“You know.”

“Why can’t you say it? Are you afraid of words?”

“I don’t like to talk about such things. But I’m scared. My family . . .”

“Don’t worry. Let’s go out.”

“Are you angry, Tree?”

“Me angry with you? I couldn’t be. I’ve no right to ever get angry with you. But don’t come near me. We’ll go out to a movie. We’d better get going before we start a love affair that neither of us want.”

Tregan was disturbed about the girl. It was truth he told her. Away from her she never entered his mind. When he saw her and touched her the desire for her was intense. Sometimes he tore himself away from contact violently. He took her to cheap movie houses. In the dark her hand would touch his. The desire for her would blind out the shouting shadows of the screen.

There would be a week’s interval. She would call him. There would come that tense moment in the dark.

“Tree. Please don’t. You mustn’t.”

Inanely the poor weak defense would sound over and over. And always as she breathed the words she would be clasping him strenuously to herself.

Afterwards would come the routine.

“Tree, don’t you love me?”

He almost cried aloud in pain as he told her the truth. It seemed as though that was the last thing he clung to. He could ravish the girl but he couldn’t lie to her.

One evening as she lay back on the bed he bent over and kissed her full mouth.

“Tree,” she whispered. “You mustn’t.”

He did not answer.

“Why do you treat me like a woman of the streets?”

The phrase seemed to hang in the air in that curious way. It was as if one could listen to it over and over again whenever one wished.

He rose. Desire fled swiftly on silent wings.

“Please get up and get dressed quickly,” he said.

"Oh Tree, you're not angry with me."

"Angry, no. But do it before I change my mind. Please."

She clung to him.

"I don't care if you don't love me, Tree."

"Please, Lola! I care. Don't you see, this can't go on. It tears the guts out of me. I'm not going to bring you anything you want. You'll find no peace and happiness in me."

"But what about me, Tree? You've got everything I had. You've taken that."

"I know. You feel that. More than I can understand perhaps. I can't appreciate the way a girl like you thinks, I suppose. But this is ended, now."

"No, Tree!"

"Yes. It's no go for either of us. You want love, and I can't give it. I want you and you aren't made for it. You want marriage and a home and plush living room furniture on the instalment plan. I can't figure in that. I only hurt you . . . bring you sorrow and regret. Do you understand what I mean?"

"No, Tree."

"Well, you've got to believe it anyhow."

"You've grown tired of me."

"Don't make me seem harsh, Lola. That sounds like a popular song. And it isn't true. I want you this minute just as much as I ever did. And, by God, I'm not going to have you. You're going home and you're not going to call me any more."

"All right," she said flatly.

She dressed and he drove her to her home in the suburbs. At the door they paused. The door opened and the girl's mother smiled from the oblong of light.

"Llewellyn," she said. "Come in."

"I can't," said Tregan. "I've got to run along."

"Well, come out any time. You're always welcome, Llewellyn."

As the soft voice sounded the phrases Tregan's flesh felt as though a scalpel was ploughing through it.

"I must go. I'm late," he said.

"How's your dear mother, Llewellyn?"

"Fine, last I heard. She's left France now—going to Spain."

He fled headlong into the darkness toward his machine.

He drove as fast as the car would go along the dark pike.

23

THE snow of Christmas was flung aside by the sweepers that clanged along the street car tracks, and the badly clad men with clattering shovels flung it into trucks and hauled it to the river.

Tregan tried with a sincerity that was beyond doubt to find a normal footing for himself. His work dealt less at this time with incoming celebrities and business banquets than with dirty little stories of confessing chorus girls and mentally crippled men charged with what were politely referred to as "statutory offenses".

But he forced himself to work over the stories carefully, expending a soundness of technique as would a tile-setter remodelling his own bathroom.

There seemed nothing else in his life but the paper-littered office. He never went to his home except to sleep. It seemed drab now that Joan came no more.

Sometimes he saw Joan. At first there was a strained impersonality—then suddenly there arrived a warmer recognition. It was as if they saw each other more clearly now they were further away, and the clashes of temper and temperament were forgotten and there was honest liking where there had been all the grief of love.

The thought of Alice never grew less. Sometimes as he walked on the street he fancied he heard her speaking in the crowds. He would wheel automatically. Once in a restaurant he saw a girl whose ash hair was almost similar. He stared at her until he suddenly realized that the girl was uncomfortable under his eyes.

In the rush of one noontime he hurried to an automat lunch—one of those admirable institutions where a handful of nickels unlock shining doors of plate glass behind which the food lies prepared. As he carried a tray to a corner he saw following him the dark eyes of a girl.

Suddenly he remembered. The girl from Venezuela. He had watched the smile come and go on her face that night at Hegerman's.

He smiled at her.

"May I sit here?"

She nodded.

"Do you still go up to Hamilton's?" he asked. He was wondering why she ate in an automat.

She shook her head.

As he ate quickly he watched her. That everlasting ability to sink into repose enveloped her. It was as if she lived but had no being.

"Are you still studying? What was it, music?"

"No," she answered.

He finished his meal. He noticed that she ate nothing.

"Goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye."

He walked away, then turned back.

"Look here, you look awfully sad. You know, the world will cheer up some day."

There came the quick smile that transformed her face.

"Listen! I have to cover a show to-night," he said "I haven't anyone to go with. Would you go?"

She shook her head.

"Go ahead," he urged. "It will do you good."

"Thank you."

"You mean you will?"

"Yes."

"Fine! What's your address?"

She told him.

"Look, I'll get round about six-thirty and we'll have dinner. We'll go to a roof garden first. It's pretty in winter. Have you ever seen the city from high up?"

"No."

"Well, that's a memory you ought to have. There are lights all below you and lots of glass to keep the cold out. You'll like it."

"All right."

"Fine, my bold *hidalgo* . . . or should you call a lady a *hidalgo*?"

"You wouldn't pronounce the aitch anyhow."

Her accent made him laugh.

"All right. I've got to run. See you at six-thirty!"

The evening was darkening as Tregan drove to the girl's house. It was an old ramshackle mansion of the brownstone era. The woodwork was gaping

through the cracking paint. He was faintly surprised at the squalor of the place. He could not connect it adequately with the foreign girl and her preposterously-tapering fingernails.

He rang the bell. Her name—what was it? As the door opened the smell of onions and stale cooking floated out. A frowsy-haired woman faced him. His mind clicked.

"Is this where Miss Mendoza lives?"

"Yes!"

The word came sulkily.

Tregan saw the woman staring at the white shirt front that showed under his half-opened overcoat. His senses went on the alert as inexplicably as the hair rises on a dog's neck at unseen danger. It turned him into the reporter at once. There was antagonism in the woman. She wanted to say something.

"I just want to see her. Shall I come in or wait here?"

"You can go up," the woman said.

"Whereabouts is it?"

"Second landing. I can't be tramping up and down."

"Of course not."

"Working my way and paying my bills—that's me. Don't leave no time for traipsing around. I pay my bills, I do."

"I haven't questioned it," said Tregan.

He started up the stairs but halfway up the girl descended. He saw her glance uneasily at the woman.

"You are early," she said.

"Yes, ahead of schedule," Tregan said. He spoke to cover the girl's uneasiness. "I was in a hurry to see you again. That's the explanation."

He heard the woman snorting behind him as he closed the door. His mind worked intuitively and quickly. He noticed that the girl's wrap was expensive—but a summer one.

Something wrong, he decided. The girl had no money—that was obvious.

He helped her into the car.

"Listen, my sweet *señorita*," he said. "You forget that this is America—not sunny Venezuela. Slip this over you or you'll freeze."

He yanked a fur coat from the rumble seat and covered her body.

"This is nice," she said.

“It ought to be,” laughed Tregan. “That’s my pride and joy—the badge of my social status. It cost me three hundred dollars and that’s more than a couple of weeks’ pay. In fact, I’m still paying for it.”

She laughed.

“Do you understand what I’m talking about?”

“No!”

The demureness of the word tickled him.

“That’s fine. I’ve found the ideal woman. I can talk to her all I want and she won’t remember a word afterwards.”

He threw the car into gear and sped from the street. The awkward moment had passed. He felt an overwhelming necessity for making the girl smile.

At the roof garden they sat by the window and looked down on the city. She smiled wanly. It was as if, seeing it for the first time, it brought her less pleasure than Tregan, who was seeing it for the hundredth. He would never look on this strange city in the strange land of America without wonder and a gasp that half-choked him.

He ordered food—more than they would eat. He watched the girl nibble the hors d’œuvres.

“Like them?”

“*Si!*”

“Fine!”

The violins wailed.

“Let’s dance.”

“You can?”

“I manage to hobble around—if you don’t mind dancing with a lame man.”

“Oh, I am sorry I—”

“Think nothing of it.”

He was amazed at her litheness. It seemed as if the American foxtrot was a clumsy affair. The saxophones wailed violet notes.

He laughed.

“How do you say ‘beautiful eyes’?”

“*Ojos bonitos.*”

“Well, *señorita*, may I have the pleasure of saying that you have *ojos bonitos*?”

The girl flashed the quick smile that transformed her face. Tregan felt her reacting to the life about her. They discovered that the show had started as they ate dessert.

He drove to the theater. The musical comedy clown's lines were inanely tickling. As they left the show the girl seemed a different creature.

"You laugh but I'll bet you never understood any of it," he said.

"I did!" Her indignation was almost comic. "I got the one about the Englishman."

"What was that?"

"About the big fish—what is it in English. A well?"

"A what?"

"The biggest fish!"

"Oh, you mean a whale."

"Yes. He was saying that the Englishmen are poor fish because even their Prince was one of the whales."

"Smart girl! Why you heard more of the show than I did."

At the office he tapped out with rapidity the short review that tabloids demand. He showed her the mechanical plant, explained the pneumatic tubes, had her name cast on a typesetting machine. Later they went to a white-tiled lunchroom and drank coffee.

"Well, we must get along," he said finally. He saw the fear creep back into her eyes. Again he felt the mental bristles rise. He felt unable to question her. He was sure she would tell him nothing if he asked. He would wait. People always told you what you wanted to know if you waited long enough. He drove her to the bedrabbled house. He got out, held open the door of the car and extended his hand to her as she sat inside.

"It's been the merriest evening I've had in a long time, my *señorita*," he said.

Then from the light of the dashlamp he saw that trouble in her eyes again. Quickly he climbed back into the machine beside her and without a word drove further down the street. She made no word of protest. At the waterfront he stopped. The headlights shone along a dock and over the greasy river. He switched them off. There was complete darkness except for the dashlight. He could scarcely make out the girl as she sat in the corner.

"The river is beautiful," he said. "And to-night has been happy."

His mind raced as he selected words.

"Because it has been happy you should be happy too. You're not. I want to ask you something, but first I want to tell you something.

“I’m not a particularly good man, but I’m not a bad one, either. I want to do nothing but be kind to you because you’re alone here. Some day you shall be kind to someone else who is in trouble.

“Do you understand all that I’ve said so far?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“You have no friends in this country—and something’s the matter. Won’t you tell me? I have lots of friends—some political friends who might help you.”

He waited. Suddenly he realized that the girl was crying quietly.

His mind raced again. Was this some sort of a frameup—a come-on? He flung the thought away. Who would benefit by framing him? He felt contrite. The girl was still crying silently. He looked out over the water and waited. The minutes loitered past. He felt unutterably clumsy.

“Don’t cry, please,” he said at last. “Take this handkerchief. I’m sorry I tried to make you tell me. You see, you don’t have to. I know what’s wrong.”

“How!” The girl cried it loudly.

Tregan laughed quietly.

“Why, I’m just a very smart fellow, that’s all. You see, I know. You’re broke. Probably you’ve spent your money too quickly and you’re ashamed to write home for more right away. I know that. You’re eating in automats. And you owe that saucy siren of a landlady a couple of weeks’ rent.

“It’s all so simple. All you have to do now is to let me lend you some money. It sounds like an old gag, but there’re no strings to it.

“I’m sorry, I guess you don’t know what I mean.”

The girl shook her head.

“Now listen—you owe your rent, don’t you?”

“Yes,” the girl whispered.

“Well, I’ll give you the money and you can pay her right to-night.”

“It is a horrible place!” she cried. “I do not wish ever to go back there. It is horrible!”

Tregan thought.

“Listen, here’s what we do, young lady. You don’t have to go back there. You can put up at a hotel to-night and to-morrow you can find a decent place. I haven’t a sock of money but we can manage that. You’ll have to have some baggage, though. I’ll fix that. I’ll pay the old dame and bring your stuff down to you.”

“I don’t want to be seeing that place any more.”

“All right. Look here! You’re shivering. I’ll drop you off at my place and you can keep warm. I’ll run right down and get your stuff, then you’ll go to a hotel, and it will be all hunky-dory. Eh?”

“*Si!*”

“That’s fine.”

Tregan drove to his apartment and let the girl in.

“Turn on the radio, mix yourself a drink, keep comfortable till I get back. Then we’ll get you some sleeping quarters.”

He drove away.

An hour later he returned. When he let himself in the room was empty. The light burned and the radio was still playing. He walked to the bedroom. The girl was asleep on the bed.

“*Señorita!*” he called softly.

She stirred slightly. Tregan stood awhile in thought. Then he switched off the light and closed the door as he left the room. In the front room he changed to a dressing gown and curled up on the couch.

“This is a hell of a note!” he was voicing mentally as he went to sleep.

The next day he decided to talk to her about her worries. He put it off. She stayed. For a while he hoped she would start talking about herself. Then he began to hope she wouldn’t. Finally both seemed to forget about it. She was part of his home.

24

IN the weeks that followed Tregan entered the backwater of emotional calm. The pornographic atmosphere of the tabloid was more than counterbalanced by the air of alertness and alert competition that permeated the place.

The little city editor at first was a thorn in Tregan's side. The rank filthiness of the man's conversation offended Tregan and the reek of bad whiskey assaulted his nose. Their first real clash came on a quiet Sunday afternoon when news was as scarce as hen's teeth. The deadline on the bulldog edition neared with no story fit for the front page streamer. True enough Mussolini had been on a rampage, a King in the Balkans was near death from complications following the bite of a pet monkey, and a scientist had discovered a new planet. But none of these could be written from a sex angle, and thus were matters for one paragraph in the tabloid.

The city editor limped over to Tregan's desk, preceded by an aura of alcohalitosis.

"Only thing we got is a holdup and I'm putting the 72 point line on it. Give me about a column. Here's the dope."

He placed before Tregan a slip which said:

"Harry J. Magran, milkman, 1842 West Junetta Street. Holdup at Collins and Bornetta Sts."

Tregan stared at the paper. He rose and walked to the city desk.

"Got anything more than this on the holdup?"

The city editor stared.

"I'll be a sonovabitch!" he said. "What in hell more do you want?"

"If I'm going to write a column I might at least need to mention how he was held up, how many men were there, how much he lost, what time it was and a few other minor points."

"You dumb bastard! If I knew wouldn't I tell you? Haven't you got any imagination? Jesus! If I had all the facts I ever need I wouldn't hire newspapermen—I could get blacksmiths to write my stories. That's what I hire reporters for."

Tregan went back to his desk. He wrote quickly a stock story, providing the "dark blue high-powered touring car", the "three swarthy men with caps

low about their faces", a few hoarse warnings not to make an outcry, and a "day's receipts totalling $83".

He laid the story on the city editor's desk.

"I'm putting my hat and coat on," said Tregan. "I'm through."

"You'll finish the day out! That's what you'll do."

"All right."

At six Tregan put on his hat and started for the door. The little man called.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a waste-paper basket. Tregan sat.

"What's the matter?"

"Just tired of being here," said Tregan.

"Why?"

"I don't like the sheet and I don't like you."

"What's wrong with us?"

"The sheet smells bad and so do you. The paper's interested in nothing but smutty stories. I could stand that but I won't stand your filthy tongue. Everyone else does round here but I don't have to. I can walk out of here and get me another job."

The little man laughed.

"Listen, son. I've worked on bigger sheets than you'll ever see. I've been in the game forty years. Let me tell you something. This sheet's a live one. That's what counts. We may go in for dirt, but we're honest about it. Don't you figure that all the old established sheets would give their front page ears to print what we print. They want to, but they're too damn sanctimonious. As for me, don't mind me. If I call you a son-of-a-bitch, what do you do?"

"I can't do much but walk out on you, seeing you're old enough to almost fall apart."

"Nothing of the sort. You should come right back at me with the same stuff. Now you're not quitting. You're going to be in on the job to-morrow."

Tregan laughed.

"All right."

In the days that followed Tregan changed his opinion of the crabbed little man. He began to appreciate his clear-sightedness in news, his unfailing vigor and his uncanny news hunches that went right seven times out of ten. And Tregan noted that much of the vitriol was gone from his tongue in their contacts.

“He’s a nasty bastard but he’s a newspaperman,” said Tregan to a rewrite man.

One evening the little hunched figure called him to his desk as Tregan was leaving. He spread out the two sheets of copy paper on which Tregan had written the story of a boy stowaway from Ireland who had been found playing marbles on the waterfront.

“What kind of a story do you call this?”

“It’s a straight story,” said Tregan.

“I suppose you think it’s well written?”

“Well . . . it’s not badly written. I did my best with it.”

“You think it’s pretty good, hey?”

“Fairly good.”

“Well, listen. Thirty years ago I was city editor of the Chicago *Tribune*. A man handed me a story. It was about a bum killed by a trolley. I never thought I would ever see a story as well written as that again. But I have—and this is it here.”

Tregan stared at the man.

“Thanks.”

“And I’m not going to use this,” the editor said. “What do you think of that?”

“No?”

“No. I have a hunch it’s a phony somewhere. The kid’s lying.”

The next day the afternoon sheets carried the straight story. The city editor’s hunch had been right.

Tregan began to get some pleasure from his work. The search for economy of verbiage in the tabloid style interested him.

His evenings fell into a routine that was quiet and pleasant. The Spanish girl stayed on at his place and neither of them mentioned the prospect of her going. Their relations were strange. At first Tregan wondered about the girl. One evening after she had gone to bed Tregan knocked at the bedroom door. She sat up and switched on the bedlight as he entered.

“You’ll have to forgive me, but I’ve got to get a pair of pajamas from the bureau,” he said.

“Oh.”

He rummaged in the drawer. As he was leaving he looked at her. She was sitting up in the bed. In the soft rays of the bedlight it was as if her thin nightdress was not there. Her breasts were small and firm. Her skin was a dark creamy brown. He had seen Negresses of lighter hue. He saw her watching him carefully. He walked to the bed and sat on the edge. For a moment he felt the warmth of her nearness. And then the picture of her little childish body swept him like a cool breeze.

"You're afraid, aren't you?"

"No. Not of you."

"That's fine. Because I want you to feel that you're all right. This needing a pair of pajamas wasn't a stall."

"A stall? What's that?"

"Never mind. Go to sleep. I sometimes wonder if you understand anything I'm talking about."

He closed the door behind him. As he did it he wondered why.

For her part the girl began to possess part of Tregan's life. She was jealous in her possessive spirit. Tregan's flat was cared for by a Negro youth who rejoiced in the name of Jefferson Lee. He dropped in for a couple of hours each day. He made the beds, took out the laundry, washed the glasses left from the night before, and went into flurries of sweeping about once every two weeks.

One evening the colored boy stopped him in the entry way.

"Mistah Tregan!"

"Yes, Jeff?"

"That there lady of yours tell me Ah caint go in."

"What for?"

"She say she don' want me no moah. She 'low she's gwine do the cleanin' hersel'."

"Shucks, don't let that trouble you! Come to-morrow. I'll talk to her to-night."

"Yes, suh."

That evening Tregan looked up from a book.

"Jeff tells me you fired him."

"What's that?"

"Fired him. Told him not to come any more. What did you do that for?"

"I can take care of your place by myself."

“I know, but you don’t want to do housecleaning. You don’t do things like that at home, do you?”

“We all learn to do something.”

“Who’s all?”

“My sisters and I.”

“I know, but you needn’t do that here.”

“But, Tregan, I am wanting so much to do that work. I have nothing to do all day and I am very pleased to do it.”

“All right. But I told Jeff to come back to-mor-row. You’d better give him this five dollars and call it square.”

The next night she returned four dollars to him.

“He only needed one to go away,” she said simply.

She appeared worried again.

“What’s wrong now?”

“We spend too much money.”

“Oh, no, we’re all right. Don’t worry.”

“Do you earn much money, Tregan?”

“Oh, pretty fair.”

“How much?”

“Oh, fifty a week and I knock down about ten on the swindle sheet.”

“What’s that?”

“I mean I have an expense account and I make about ten dollars extra each week. Everyone does.”

“You earn sixty altogether.”

“Uhuh! I used to get more but this tab’s a low scale.”

“Oh! Do you save anything?”

“Goodness me, no!”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. Newspapermen don’t have the saving habit, I guess. If you have any extra money someone borrows it and you never see it again. Why? What’s all this about?”

“I am sorry, Tregan—I wanted to help you. I feel very bad because you pay for my food and I can’t help.”

"What's the difference? I spent all I had before I knew you and I spend it all now. You couldn't save on what I earn."

"But I could help."

"What for?"

"We should not go to restaurants every night. It costs too much money. We should eat here. I can cook nice things that you would like."

"Oh, don't worry about it."

"Wouldn't you like to?"

"Oh, sure, if it makes your merry soul happy, go ahead."

The next evening as Tregan came home he heard the girl bustling in the kitchenette.

"What's happening?" he called.

"Come," she answered.

He looked at a dish of steaming food.

"What's that?"

"Chili con carne. Did you ever eat it?"

"No. It smells good, though."

"You'll like it."

Tregan tasted it.

"Sure—it's pretty good."

He looked up. He had never seen the girl so happy.

From that time on Tregan and the girl slipped into domesticity. Tregan, in common with the journalistic crew the world over, had a childish irresponsibility in money matters. It was not the slightest effort for him to hand over the responsibility to the girl.

Each morning he would hear her stirring. She would wake him as the coffee bubbled in the percolator. With religious care she would see that he had three dollars in his pocket as he left. How she ever arrived at three dollars as the appropriate sum Tregan never knew.

After Tregan left the girl would go back to bed. She would loll there for hours, awake but in profound repose. At noon she would rise and go shopping for food. She hated the cold and never stayed out long.

In the evenings Tregan would come home to his apartment with the sense of finality written to each day. The girl would serve the food and he forgot entirely about restaurants. Afterward they would splash the dishes in the kitchenette. Tregan was hardly conscious of the fact that he was wearing an apron and wiping dishes. With petty tasks completed he would sit and

read. They conversed little. From time to time Tregan would glance up at the girl. There was a pleasantness in the knowledge of her proximity.

She spent hours going over his clothes, sewing on them, checking on his laundry. He never noticed that all the buttons were on his shirts. In that he was not unusual. Men miss no buttons that are on—they miss only the ones that are off.

Sometimes he asked the girl to go out in the evening to the shows. She protested.

"I do not like the cold. It is warm here."

Soon Tregan stopped asking her.

One night he went to pour himself a drink. The decanter was empty.

"That's funny, Olivia. I thought this was half full."

"It was very bad whiskey. I poured it out."

"Poured it out?"

"*Sí.*"

Tregan went back to his book. A few moments later the girl sat at his feet. Her face was troubled.

"You are not angry, Tregan? It was such very bad whiskey and I did not like to think that you drink it. It was so bad for you."

"Don't look like that, my little flower. Listen, I don't get angry at anything you do. I guess we're sort of tied up together. We've got our lives jumbled up with each other and I suppose you've got the right to have a say-so. It's a fifty-fifty proposition. I can't explain what I mean exactly—but I know what I mean all right."

"Then you are not angry that I am staying here?"

"No, child! You're my shield and buckler, my fortress and my strength, a regular light to lighten the Gentiles. Know what that means?"

She shook her head. He took her chin in his hand.

"It all means a lot of good things, Olivia," he said. "It means you're a regular señorita bonita."

The girl seemed satisfied with her position in Tregan's menage. Sometimes Tregan wondered about her and her future. At odd moments he meant to ask her but in the curious makeshift way of his type he always put off uncomfortable matters until to-morrow. He knew only that she was well-bred although appallingly ignorant in mundane affairs. He gained a vague impression that her father was a man of some wealth in Venezuela.

But in general they talked little. There was a strange pall of somberness hanging over the girl although Tregan hardly noticed it. Sometimes in rare gay moments she would take an old ukulele from the wall and sing Spanish and Latin-American songs. The mood never lasted long but Tregan always enjoyed it. Her voice was tiny but round and smooth in tone. As she sang the lilts of curious tempo Tregan would close his eyes and dream of hot lands where castanets clicked and guitars strummed, where the language was limpid and dark eyes flashed. It was quite a story-book Central America that Tregan pictured.

It stirred old memories—his step-mother and the guitar—their dance in the dark parlor years ago. He remembered he had not answered her last letter. She was home in Spain, again. She liked it. And now there was Spanish again. This girl. She had taught him to sing snatches of popular songs. Tregan would grin at her and chant:

Para subir al cielo
Se necessita
Una escalare grande
Y otra chiquita.

This always sent the girl into a rare peal of laughter. Like a child hearing an oft-repeated fairy tale she never failed to appreciate the point. To Tregan it was vague. She tried a dozen times to point out to him the catch in the song—and learned that it is almost impossible to translate a joke. Tregan never saw anything humorous in it. To him it always remained merely something about musical advice towards getting to heaven, which feat, it seemed, needed as necessity only a large ladder and a little girl.

The year wore on and the new one came. Tregan remained content. One day he got a telephone call from Alice. She and her husband were in town. There were a few people dropping in after the theater that night. Would Tregan care to run in? He promised he would.

The office that day seemed suddenly unbearable. Tregan put on his hat and walked the streets. He decided that he would not see Alice. He repeated the assertion a dozen times to himself. But that evening he dressed carefully.

“I’ll be back not long after midnight, Olivia,” he said.

The girl’s eyes followed him.

25

TREGAN had an impression of people packed together almost beyond endurance. The smoke haze hung in a blanket over the knotted mass of stiff shirts and decolletage. One had to shout to make oneself heard over the conglomerate roar of a hundred conversations.

A few people stared at him, but beyond that no one seemed to be concerned over his arrival—or over the arrival or departure of anyone else for that matter. He elbowed his way to a bedroom and laid his hat and coat and cane on a bed.

By a bureau two slim young men were straightening their ties. One picked up a comb and ran it through his hair.

"It stays up nicely. I set it in combs this afternoon."

Tregan realized that they were using Alice's toilet articles. He saw one of them pick up a framed photo.

"Gorgeous creature!"

"If you like the type," said the other. They left.

Tregan walked to the bureau. He felt a sudden warmth in his throat as he looked at the picture. He glanced at the other. It was of Alice's husband. Across it was scrawled "To the sweetest girl, with love. Harry". There seemed to be something indecent in leaving it for everyone to see. Tregan placed it face down and limped from the bedroom. Soon he found himself in a corner holding a highball. He watched the hotel captain superintending the buffet. People ate and drank, but never stopped talking.

"Tree!"

It was Alice. A few people nearby craned their necks.

"All in a corner by yourself! How long have you been here?"

The words would not come.

"Dear Tree!"

They held hands helplessly.

"You must meet Harry," she said finally. She pulled him forward by the hand.

"Harry, this is Llewellyn Tregan. He's a very good friend of mine."

Tregan's intuitive dislike of the man fled as he talked. Behind the usual professional manner there was a rough charm to the man. Tregan immediately pictured the young boy, singing in cabarets, picking nickels

from the sawdust, shivering in chilly wings on opportunity nights, fighting every step toward success, believing always in the supreme worth of Harry Richolds.

"Glad to know you!" The man's voice was clear and penetrating. "Captain, a drink here! Oh, you have a drink. Well, never mind, have another. It's great to meet Alice's friends.

"What do you do? Newspaper. Say, a great bunch, the newspaper boys. I remember out on the coast . . ."

The babble drowned the rest. A champagne bottle popped. A girl laughed stridently.

He saw Alice nearby.

"It's a jam, isn't it?"

"Just like the lobby at the opera."

He smiled. He wanted her to think he enjoyed it.

She was gone. The din never lessened.

"I said to her, 'Look here, you little tramp—' "

It was Richolds. He was gesticulating as he talked. A man with a hooked nose was nodding.

"You done right, Harry. You done right," he intoned.

"I says to her, 'You little tramp! You may be the director's hotsy-totsy all you want off the lot, but let me tell you one thing, I'm starring here and you're going to take your time from me. I'm going to give you a calldown that you'll never forget, you little tramp!' "

"You done right, Harry. You done right."

"Who was she, to go walking off the set every pause? Two hundred people sitting there waiting for her. I told her! 'You can keep two hundred extras waiting,' I said, 'but, by God, you tramp, you won't make me wait on a set, no matter whose hotsy-totsy you are!'

"So I just walked off the set and went to my dressing room. I stripped and took a swim. Just as I'm swimming, without a stitch, the phone rings. They want to know what I'll do. I tell them I'm going right back to New York by the next train. Well, that starts the ruckus. They come over . . ."

A woman pushed past Tregan. He found himself back in the corner again. A black-eyed girl spoke to him.

"*Vouse avez une allumette?*"

Tregan gave her a match. She watched him as she lit her cigarette.

"Do you know Pierre Louys' stuff?" she said.

"Never read it in my life," said Tregan.

He pushed his way to the bedroom. Alice he could not see anywhere. He walked through a French window to a balcony. The cool air cleared his head. The snow whirled past, finely, incessantly. The hemorrhage of sound was cut off. Four hundred feet below the city lights stabbed spots through the snow that swirled down finely, incessantly. He lit a cigarette, cupping his hands.

"Tree!"

He saw a movement in a sheltered corner.

"Alice! Alone?"

"Uh huh! I just wanted to get a breath of air."

They stood in the dark. There seemed so little to say.

"It's a long way down," Tregan offered.

"Yes. You weren't thinking of jumping, were you?"

He laughed. "If I jumped I wouldn't fall. I've always had the firmest conviction that I could volplane down. I feel sure if I stretched out my arms I could zoom down slowly."

They stood and watched the snow. The flakes came from the nowhere of darkness, fell steadily through the few feet of light from nearby windows, and passed on to another oblivion. The steady downfall was almost hypnotic. Soon it seemed as if all worldly dimensions were gone, as if the snow were not falling but instead they and their small corner of darkness were rising, eternally climbing breathlessly. Tregan became dizzy. He turned and they talked commonplaces. Tregan chose his words carefully.

"Shall you go out to the coast?"

"I don't know. You see, Harry knows where he has to go such a short time ahead."

"Oh. How was Paris?"

"Fearfully cold. It rained incessantly."

"I'm sorry."

They were silent again as they watched the snow. Tregan walked to the edge of the balcony and leaned on the rail. She stood beside him.

"It's like paper snow," she said.

"Just like Scene III of *Bohême*. Remember?"

"Up in the balcony?"

"Yes."

"Bori and Martinelli."

"They were beautiful."

“Yes,” she said. “Rodolfo and Mimi. I don’t think anyone ever sang better than they did in that duet.”

He was silent.

“Mimi came back to Rodolfo,” he said, suddenly.

He turned to her.

“*Bohême* is a namby-pamby opera,” he said. “That old stuff about the beautiful consumptive coming home to die. Why is tuberculosis a nice poetical disease? Why can’t these failing heroines suffer from cancer or intestinal ulcers once in a while? Mimi is a washout. I’d sooner have one Musette in spite of the fact that she’s a . . .” he chose the word carefully “. . . a little tramp.”

She looked at him.

“Tree, you’re the only one that makes me believe in Xeno. You’d bite the ear off a tyrant if it was the last bite you took. Even if the tyrant was rather a beautiful tyrant.”

She laid her hand on his.

“What are you fighting, Tree?”

He felt the tears welling in his eyes, hot as they were in childhood.

“Please don’t nurture my capacity for self-pity, Alice. It’s quite well-developed as it is. If I knew what I’m batting against I’d know what Einstein’s talking about—I’d know what makes the public go to some plays and not to others. It’s just a sort of mental cold in the head I have. It doesn’t hurt and I don’t even notice it.”

Her hand was warm on his.

“I’d better be going, Alice.”

“Yes. You’d better go.”

“Won’t you go in too?”

“I’ll wait a little while.”

“Don’t jump off!”

“Not a chance!”

He pushed open the French window. The drone of conversation swirled out.

“Goodnight, Tree,” she said.

“Goodbye, Mrs. Richolds.”

He felt as if the name were a dagger and he’d stabbed her with it quickly.

He grabbed his things from the bed and pushed his way out through the main room.

“The little tramp . . . she couldn’t get away with that!” he heard.
The sycophantic obstinate bass rose in rhythm.
“You done right, Harry! You done right.”

26

THE snow was thick underfoot as Tregan stumbled from the building in an intoxication of anger that had no focal point. He almost walked under a taxi as he crossed the street. The machine went skidding, with locked wheels, toward the gutter. The driver swore.

Tregan bowed his head and limped out toward the park. There was surcease in fighting the wind and snow. This, at least, seemed to be something at which he could strike back—something that by determination he could master. Life—you couldn't master that. You struck at it with your clenched fist and you never hit anything. It was like striking at a vacuum.

His breath clouded as he passed under the arc-lights on the parkway. There had been no pedestrians for hours and the paths were unbroken. A few automobiles ground past on the road, their tire chains beating a dismal clank on the mud-guards. The night settled down in silence and the city was only a dull glare, low on the skyline behind him.

By the river a light shone from a guard-house. A policeman stepped from the warmth of the place. The flood of light blinded Tregan's eyes.

"Kind of bad night," the man said.

Tregan waved his cane. The policeman watched him as he walked on.

The snow hissed as it sifted through the naked maples that bordered the paths. Fine and dry, it swept over the roads in eddies and drifted in leeward backwaters. Down on the frozen river it raced in serrated waves over windswept ice that glistened dully.

Tregan's feet became numb. The snow sifted into his thin pumps. His lame foot began to drag. He pulled it along, hating the clumsy piece of bone and flesh with all the hate that egotism could muster. He felt toward himself that secret horror that every straight man feels toward a body that is twisted and maimed.

The fierceness of the pain in his foot came like a relief. He almost cried for joy as the physical torture of walking pulled his mind away from the mental torture of thinking about Alice.

Anything seemed better than going home and looking at Olivia. His mind raced in circles about Alice—dazzling circles like those on the opticians' cards, that wheeled and spun and had neither ending nor rest.

He crossed the river on a footbridge. The pain fled from his foot and there remained nothing but numbness. The city glowed in the sky to the left

and the dry snow hissed.

The hours marched and he found himself out of the park and back in the city. By a street corner he stopped to warm himself at a great bonfire of railroad ties, where a construction crew labored over street car tracks. The flames surged toward him and he held out his hands. An old watchman looked at him, nodded, and went on smoking.

The warmth began to creep into his body and his hands and feet were seared with pain as the blood pumped into them. He started away. Halfway down the block he paused. The gang of workmen were moving long rails for the tracks. He watched them working, with envy. The men, all Negroes, were not the thin, flip, racetrack darkies. Lithe black men they were, with muscles that shone under the great acetylene lights flooding the work area. Even in the snow they worked with coats thrown aside. Tregan watched one of them walking—walking like a black panther.

Tregan suddenly hated their muscular strength. He felt only envy for their litheness—the activity that was not his any more.

Then he watched them move a huge rail. With great pincers and crowbars they swarmed about the clumsy piece of steel. Their bodies swung forward together with the short, quick rhythm of a perfect racing crew.

Tregan could almost feel himself in the shell again, sweeping down the river, eight backs curving forward in unison, sixteen wrists twisting together, sixteen legs driving in perfect time as the blades sank with a bite into the water. The coxswain would be leaning forward with his body set against the drive, barking through his megaphone, "Snappy catch, men—drive with those legs, men—just four more good ones, men—hetch, shoot away—hetch, shoot away—hetch, shoot away!"

The Negroes were singing as they worked. The leopard-like brown man was out in front. He did not work himself. He faced the men and chanted,

"When Ah says swing, we aaa-a-all swings it!"

He swung his arms, the bodies bowed like bowshafts. The men chanted in unison:

"Hyaugh!"

The rail swung forward a few feet.

"When Ah says swing, we aa-all swings it!"

"Hyaugh!"

The men swung and straightened, swung and straightened, and the great steel rail went yard by yard into place.

Tregan leaned his head back against the wall. All envy of the men had gone. There was only a fatigue that was peace. His eyelids drooped tiredly.

"Feeling bad?"

Tregan opened his eyes. A patrolman.

"Just sleepy. I think I'll be getting home."

"Wanna taxi? Ya can get one down the corner there."

"I think I'd better. Down that corner?"

"No—over by the lunch wagon. Ask inside for Hoibert!"

The patrolman walked along as Tregan limped toward the corner.

"Party?"

"Yes—sort of," answered Tregan.

"Terrible bum stuff they puts out these days."

"Bum stuff, sure!"

"Get some didn't agree wit' ya?"

"Yes—pretty bad." It was easier than trying to talk sense.

"Ya look pretty bad. Ya wanna do what I do. Make my own—beer. Course, it smells ya place up a bit when ya berl it."

"There's drawbacks to everything."

"Sure—that's what I'm always saying. There's drawbacks to everything, no matter which way you look at it. When one door opens the other door closes, sort of."

"You play the red and the black comes up."

"Sure, that's right. That's just what I told my missus when the last youngster come along. It was a girl and we had three girls. I tells her sure it was gonna be a boy this time. But you plays the black and the red comes up, like you said."

They halted by the lunch wagon.

"Hey, Hoibert! Ya gotta fare out here."

Tregan tumbled into the cab. The wheels spun as it lurched away. His teeth began to chatter. It seemed hours before he was home. When he stumbled into the room he saw Olivia waiting, her dressing gown wound closely about her. Her eyes were large. He sat on the couch, exhausted. His teeth chattered.

"Not *bolo, florecilla*; just tired," he muttered.

He was aware of her bustling about: the water splashed in the bathroom.

"You take a hot bath, Tregan, and you will feel better."

She helped him off with his coat, then knelt at his feet and tugged at the shoe laces.

"Don't do that, child. I'll do it."

"I can do it."

"You mustn't."

In the hot bath his hands and feet throbbed with the pain of restored circulation. He wrapped a dressing gown about himself. The girl had made up the couch. Fear and trouble alternated in her eyes.

He sat on the couch, holding his head.

"I was afraid, Tregan. I was thinking you were killed."

"No such luck! Only the good die young, child."

"I wasn't knowing you ever to come home so late."

"I went walking."

"Why did you do such a foolish thing in this cold snow?"

Tregan smiled.

"Why do men ever do things that are miserable or foolish—or beautiful?"

"Because they are thinking about a woman."

"If anyone should drive up in a dark blue sedan and ask you if you're right you can tell 'em you're right."

"What does that mean?"

"Never mind. I just mean you're right."

"Tregan," she said shyly, "it is that one?"

He saw she was pointing to a framed photo of Alice. He stared at her. For a moment he became aware of her as he had never been in the past weeks; he realized her as an entity with understanding and hopes and fears of her own.

"What makes you think that?"

"You are not being angry with me for talking about it?"

"No, child. Probably do me good to take thoughts out and wash them with the dishes."

"Well, I watch you looking at it."

"Oh, I surely don't stare at it like that!"

"No, not stare. But you look at it sometimes as you walk past and I am thinking to myself that she is the girl you are loving. She looks very beautiful."

“Regular Sherlock Holmes, aren’t you? I suppose you know all I think about by now.”

“You don’t tell me. All I see is when you look at things. That girl, I say to myself, he loves. That next picture, I say, that girl was kind to him and he loves her but not like the first picture. Some of the other pictures I think are girls you loved once and are forgetting all about now, because your eyes don’t stop on them.”

There was a pause.

“Have you loved a lot of women, Tregan?”

“What a question! I suppose so.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know.”

“You mean that you have forgotten?”

“I don’t know. I guess you don’t sit down and count, that’s all.”

“You’d remember if you really loved them.”

“I suppose I would. A man doesn’t always love women he makes love to. He just makes love because it’s the nature of the beast.”

“You don’t make love to me.”

“No. Because you don’t want me to for one thing.”

“Would you if I did?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t think of you like that. It’s hard to explain. Here we are living together—and I suppose no one would believe either of us if we told the truth. I might have made love to you except somehow I know you don’t want me to. Men get to know women who want love and those that don’t.

“You, my little flower, you’re more like a child. You see, I have a little girl somewhere of my own. She’ll be growing up now. Probably she’s almost as big as you. You always make me think of her. Sort of a pretty chromo-lithograph on a calendar in four colors with compliments of the Underdunk Mortuary Company. Little girl with bare feet lost in the snow and gent with evil moustaches and top hat saying: ‘I cannot ruin this child for she reminds me of my own lost daughter.’ ”

“I don’t understand.”

“That’s fine. I only mean, you little Dago, that for some reason that’s marvellous and strange, I have a strong inclination to be more decent to you than I am generally to people. You’re a little too trusting to mix in with this

merry clip that I, and all the rest of the gang we know, race around in. It's pretty messy—swapping women and quoting about 'if I loved you Thursday what is that to me?' You'll go home to Venezuela and you'll have a duenna sit alongside you while some nice young Don Tobasco del Con Carne proposes honest marriage in a perfectly proper way."

The girl was quiet. The clock ticked in the silence.

"Well, I guess we'd better turn in. Will you switch off the light as you go out?"

Tregan pulled himself under the bedclothes as the place plunged into darkness. He waited uneasily for something. He couldn't remember what.

"Tregan!"

He sat up. Then he remembered what he had been waiting for: the closing of the door. The girl was walking toward him in the darkness.

"What is it, *florecilla*? Turn on the light."

"No," she said. "It is better dark."

She sat on the bed beside him. He waited.

"Tregan," she said finally, "do you think they are all bad women?"

"Who?"

"All those that you have made love to and have forgotten?"

"Why, no. What made you think that? It's just that people's bodies and minds are two different things. What the body wants sometimes runs off with you. Afterward it's still and then it's different."

"Then you don't think a girl is bad if she makes love with a man?"

Tregan felt the warmth of the girl's body in the darkness. Now that he no longer could see her he was aware only of the darkness that closed them.

"Yes," he said. "In most cases she's bad. Ever since the war we've all been running like geese with our heads off chanting that it wasn't wrong. But here's one time I tell the truth. Call it expressing yourself, contract marriage, free love, advanced thinking, anything you want—it's still fornication. And that means it's not for a nice youngster like you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now run off to bed and I'm poppa's damn fool. First thing you know I'll be singing with the Salvation Army."

She moved slowly. In the silence he heard a low noise. Suddenly he realized that she was crying. He jumped from the couch. His hands touched her in the darkness.

“Please don’t cry,” he said. “I can’t stand it—not to-night. I didn’t mean you’re a fool. I just mean—oh, damn it—I mean you’re a good kid.”

He drew her head close to him. In the darkness he could feel only that her tiny body was like that of a child.

“Now don’t cry any more. I like you.”

“It isn’t you, Tregan. It is me.”

“Oh, there’s nothing wrong with you, child. You’re sweet.”

“I am not.”

“Sure you are. You’re a regular paragon of all that’s superlative and you make my home just home sweet home if anyone should drive up in a streamlined motorboat and ask you.”

“I am a bad girl.”

“I didn’t say that. I said you would be if you started sowing wild oats.”

“But I am.”

“You’re not at all.”

He held her in the darkness as the minutes passed. She clung to him.

“Tregan!”

“Now what?”

“Oh, never mind.”

“Go ahead and tell me. What is it?”

“I am going to have a baby.”

He shook his head as though to scatter the words from his ears. Unsteadily he walked back to the couch. She followed him and knelt beside him, grasping his knees fiercely.

“Oh, don’t be ashamed of me, Tregan!”

He pressed her shoulders.

“I’m not, girl. I didn’t mean to let go of you.” He laughed inanely.

“The idea just came rather suddenly. Are you sure?”

He felt her nodding in the darkness.

“How long have you known? Maybe you’re mistaken.”

“No, I have been sure a long time.”

“Christ! Who’s the man? Do I know him?”

The girl clung to him and cried without answering.

Tregan sat in the darkness. His mind raced.

“Never mind, *florecilla*. You needn’t tell me anything about it.”

His anger, inexplicable to him, ebbed. Compassion welled in its place.

"Now you will be wanting to make me go," the girl said.

"That's only in silly stories, child," he said softly. "You've been a sweet girl and I'll never be sorry you came here. It's just a jam that we've got to get out of. You don't ever have to tell me anything you don't want to. I'll never ask you. I think we can get it fixed up somehow. I'll find out. Now you just forget it if you can and go to sleep."

"All right."

In the dimness he could see her straightening her hair.

"Feel better now?"

"I feel happier because I have told you."

"Sure! You always do when you get something off your chest. That's why the Catholic Church makes a big hit. It listens to your ailments. I guess you've had a tough time."

"I have been so frightened."

"Sure!"

The words tumbled from the girl's mouth as though, once started, the rest of the story followed like beads on a string.

"All the time in that horrible place where I was staying I was afraid."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I was afraid. Always so afraid of everyone."

"Was that why you were broke?"

"No. My father wrote me to come home, but I was afraid to go home like this. He would find out and I would kill myself. My father writes please come home. But I write back and say that I am staying here for some more months. So he writes back and says I must come, so I write and say that I have not spent my money and can stay longer. But my father is angry because I do not go right home when he asks me to. My father gets very angry like that if we don't do as he says. But I dare not write for more money because he would tell me to come home. All this time I have been so afraid—until you helped me."

"You haven't been afraid of me?"

"No, not of you, Tregan. You are a very kind man. You only think you are very bad—a very tough man. But you are not. I watch you."

"That's fine. I'm getting a good reputation. Now you run off to bed, because I've got some thinking to do. And don't worry. I'll get some

medicine for you. Old Doc Stork Cheater himself, that's me! And we'll have you all fixed up soon."

"Can you do that?"

"I don't know. I'll try."

"How?"

"Don't ask me to-night. I'll tell you later. You ought to be asleep."

"But I couldn't sleep now. I would sleep if I knew. Do you mean I don't have to have a baby?"

"People don't sometimes."

"How?"

"God, child! Do I have to go into it all? I know someone who'll get some medicine. I don't know what good it is. If it doesn't work, well . . ."

"What?"

"You'll have to have an operation—unless you'd rather have the child."

"No . . . I don't want the baby."

"Well . . . that's the path out. God, what a mess!"

They sat in the darkness a long time. The clock ticked. She clung to his knees.

"Will it need a lot of money, Tregan?"

"I was just thinking about it. If it's . . . the other thing, we'll need about one hundred and fifty dollars. I was just thinking, though. There's a fellow wanted me to do some stuff for him. Feeding babies by mail, or something. He has all the data but it has to be pulled into shape. He doesn't know anything about writing."

"Will he give you the job?"

"I don't know. He was after me to do it last week but I didn't want to. It's a sort of advertising booklet. I'll call him on the phone to-morrow and see if he still wants it done. If he does it'll be a couple of hundred dollars. Now, either way you're all right—so run off to bed, will you?"

"*Sí mi gran amigo.*"

Her feet pattered to the bedroom. Tregan sat in an eternity of darkness. His mind spun, wearily echoing the weariness of his body.

So the girl was pregnant. He laughed. He had been easy. Here on this couch for many nights he had slept alone. In the next room the small brown body had lain warmly between sheets. He pictured her body. From the shoulders down the skin changed in tone, taking a slight tinge of purple as the breast curved gently. Someone had possessed her. Why hadn't he?

Wearily he shook off the idea. One could do decent things once in a while. It was so seldom that he had. One couldn't seduce a child. There was his own child somewhere. Twelve years old now. Nearly thirteen.

He tried to picture her. It was impossible. All he could picture again was a head on his pillow—lost in a smother of hair.

"God so do to me if I bring her suffering!"

He had said that. But he had brought Barbara pain. He had planted in her his seed. She had suffered the double burden of childbirth and loneliness. She had loved him. And he had been in France.

And so had he suffered. Perhaps God had heard him. He half-believed in God then. Perhaps there was a God if you believed in Him and none if you didn't. But he had suffered almost pain for pain.

He had gone walking on up toward that hill. The twisted and gnarled trees on the crest tortured with shell-fire; the acrid smell of the burning explosives as the shells dropped; the long plumes of earth that seemed to rise of their own accord because the shell-detonations were lost in the continuous drum of the barrage.

The sun had glinted dully through the dust and fine smoke and he had slipped into the slime of a shell-hole. He had crawled up—like crawling over a garbage heap, it had been. The concussion of the barrage had sent the air pounding against his eardrums—like pressure on his head. That barrage—a wild symphony of drums—exalting, elevating, driving away all fear.

All alone he had gone on. The captain had called him. "Tregan! Tregan!"

And he had gone on, shouting: "Just below the knee, you bastards—just below the knee!"

That's where they all wanted it. They used to sing it: "Send me a Blighty just below the knee!"

It was the only way to get home. She had wanted him home. She had written. "Please, dear boy, ask for leave if you can get it. I don't mind at all about the baby coming and I wouldn't be afraid if you were near me for a while. I am not being a coward—but I want you here so much. I am afraid. I am . . . I want you here."

And there was no leave. A good Blighty one—that was the only way to get home. A good one—just below the knee, you bastards! And he had talked on—alone. The machine-gun bullets hissed through the grass like snakes. Then they had lifted in range and he had heard them whistle past in rapid succession—chirping like a Hartz Mountain canary. They were never going to hit him. He was at the foot of the hill alone—he could see the men crouching behind the guns. A heavy machine gun started to steam—a cloud

rose. He saw them picking up the gun and running—they were running—they wouldn't give him the Blighty—they were running.

Then the German officer had run out—an officer with a clean young face showing above an enormously high straight collar. Automatically Tregan had thrown his bayoneted gun forward to the "on guard". The man had drawn back his arm—thrown. Tregan had spun over into the shell-hole. He had looked at his leg. His foot was numb. The leather of his boot was shredded. He had got his Blighty. Then he had been violently sick.

In that shell-hole—lying in the sun waiting for the rest to come up. And that day had become the next day. The sun had blazed down. That ground-sheet—propping it up with his rifle to try to make a little shade. He had raved. His tongue had blackened. He was going to lie there between the lines forever—and die. And he wanted to get home—that was all—no war—no fighting—let me go home. He had cried it.

Then there had been a cool interlude. It must have been night. He crawled—anywhere as long as he didn't stay there. That water-bottle he had found. The German boy who had carried it had been hit between the eyes, and his tortoise-rimmed glasses had been smashed—bits of them driven into the wound.

The water-bottle was full—water, not the bitter coffee most of them carried, it was water. And Tregan had flung it away. Horrible—it tasted like the dead man smelled—it was impregnated with the odor of death.

The slime of another shell-hole and the sun creeping overhead—the smell of his own ankle—the vermin clustering about the wound, pouring into it. Was this death? All this agony! And all he wanted to do was to get home. She was all alone. And she couldn't bear it all alone.

Four days he was there, they told him afterwards. He got a medal. He had almost captured the hill single-handed. And he had not laughed. What was there to laugh at? He had got home—and it was too late. It had all gone for nothing. All the pain of it and the suffering and the longing. All that jolting in a stretcher for miles. All for nothing. For she was dead.

She had been dead when they set him down beside the dressing station. The rain coming down on his face had waked him. Beside him the other stretchers had lain in solid British ranks—men on them waiting dumbly and so patiently for someone to come and take them away.

But at that time he had been glad the rain waked him, for he could be conscious that, at last, he was going home to her—for he didn't know she was dead then. When the man had come round with the morphine tablets he had shaken his head. He wanted to stay awake and enjoy the reality of the

thought that he was going to her. One should keep consciousness for good things. Once on a long route march he had fallen asleep as they fell out on the roadside for the five minutes of rest that came every hour. His shoulders were tortured with the pack straps and he had dozed. The moment he had dropped into sleep someone had roused him and yelled for the fall-in. It seemed that he hadn't been there a second asleep—and yet the five minutes had passed. He felt he had been cheated. He never went to sleep during rests after that. It was better to stay awake and realize the beautiful joy of easing the pack straps from the shoulders.

He had wanted in just the same way to stay conscious so that he should know he was going home. But the man had made him take the morphine. The last thing he felt was the hard pressure of a pencil on his forehead. The man was marking a cross with the indelible lead that ran blue in the rain. The cross showed that he had had morphine and shouldn't be given more.

After that he remembered little. The rumble of a train and men groaning about him in the darkness. The lap of waves and the marching of newly arrived troops at the seaport. He had just known those flashes for a moment. But he hadn't known she was dead. He didn't find that out until he was in the wooden hospital in Essex.

Really he had known it subconsciously for a long time before he got the letter, but he had stamped on the thought and ground it back into cells from which it kept peeping. He knew it because there had been no word from her. He wrote as soon as he was able to get paper and pencil. But there had been no answer. Until the letter came from her father.

"I note from your address that you are in hospital and therefore the letter I sent to you in France must have reached there after you were wounded. As I notified you then, my daughter died on October 17th. Her child, a daughter, is with us."

"*My daughter*" it had been and "*her child*". Not "your wife" and "your child".

It had been no use. She had died the day before he went walking alone toward the hill. What did it matter? All there was left of it was a foot that dragged a little clumsily. He hated that.

And now there was that circle again. Life within life; a body that would bring forth a body. Only this time it shouldn't happen.

Tregan sought to find coolness on the hot pillow. It was no use thinking in circles. It didn't do any good. All he had to do now was to get a little

money. It was a messy business—but it couldn't be helped.

The dawn stole coldly gray through the window. It was no use trying to get any sleep. He climbed from the couch and dressed quietly. He sat there a long time. The city awoke. He looked into the next room at the girl, sleeping. He went to the office.

27

WOMEN were wondering how long skirts could be (and still remain not too ultra) and with a great deal of newspaper publicity John Hughes Curtis was sentenced to a year in prison for exercising a warped mania for publicity in connection with the kidnapping of the son of Charles Augustus Lindbergh.

With headlong haste humans moved away from the outskirts of Sao Paulo, where a revolt was led by the Brazilian army; people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think of the thousands of American war veterans who were driven by troops hurling gas bombs from vacant lots in Washington, in the course of which operation one William Hashka, of Chicago, was killed.

Two men, named Mattern and Bennett, with notable courage, set out from the United States to fly round the world and crashed in Russia; a half-witted Italian, styled a "red", shot at Franklin Delano Roosevelt, president-elect of the United States, and missing his target cut short the life of Anton Cermak, mayor of Chicago; in the interests of civilization yellow men with the latest weapons of warfare moved on Asiatic frontiers, suppressing natives, thereby leaving many widows to mourn the suppressed and irritating many men of white races who were upset to see Orientals exercising a prerogative usually considered that of Caucasian soldiers.

Lifeless bodies lay on bleak plains of Asia as troops, called in the press "Communists and bandits", swept on their marauding way; burning against injustice rebels took the town of Trujillo in Peru and were later shot to death by soldiers for their pains; the world seemed to be going to pot in India, Palestine and the United States where harassed citizens rose in protest against the laws and rules that bound them; some 49,000 strikers hoped against hope in the coal fields of Ohio and Illinois, while a goodly number of adult persons spent many hours becoming expert in fitting odd-shaped bits of wood together in a game called jigsaw puzzles.

A few brave men submitted to the United States Senate a report declaring that police and prosecutor had violated the law in the trial of Thomas J. Mooney; many experts delivered themselves of the opinion that business conditions were sure to improve if the United States stayed on the gold standard, while the world blithely whistled something about a hey-nonny-nonny-and-a-hot-cha-cha and turning out of the lights and going to bed, and decided that this man Jack Pearl, was "a card".

28

THE taller of the two men tapped Tregan on the shoulder.

"You're Tregan, ain't you?"

Tregan turned. "Sure."

"Cap'n Dan'd like to talk to you a while."

"Up at the station?"

"Sure."

"I'm pretty busy—what's it about?"

"I dunno."

"A story?"

"Yeah—I guess that's it. He wants to tell you sumpin' about a story."

The bigger man looked at the smaller man.

"Sure," the small one said. "He wants to tell you sumpin' about a story. About an important story, this is."

"All right! Wait till I stuff this money in my wallet."

"Ya just been cashin' a check, hey?"

"Yes."

"We saw you was cashin' a check, didn't we, Hack?"

"Sure. We seen him cashin' the check."

He grinned. Tregan moved from the bank. The men flanked him. One went ahead through the swinging doors. The other followed him. Tregan felt the hairs on his neck rise.

"You fellows district dicks?"

"Yeah. Fifteent' District."

They walked along in silence.

"Say! What's Dan want to see me about?" asked Tregan.

"I dunno," said the big one. "I guess he'll tell you all right when you get there."

The little one grinned. "Sure, he'll tell you all right."

"Say, look here, are you flatfeet trying to kid me?"

"No—we wouldn't kid you, Mr. Tregan. Would we, Hack?"

"Naw—we wouldn't kid him."

They climbed on a street car. Tregan had that vague, uncomfortable feeling that makes a person believe he has forgotten to do something that should have been done. He lost it as he looked about the car. The advertisements flanked each other in a row above the straps: “Ex-Lax—Chic Sale.” “Have you tried Bell-Ans?” “Take yeast for your health’s sake!” “She never knew why she was unpopular.” “Mum!” “Chew it after every meal!”

He wondered about the people around him and the advertisements. Were they all concerned about their bowel movements?

The big detective nudged him and they left the car, walked to the station house. The institutional smell met him as he entered. A boy at a table rose.

“Hello, Mr. Tregan.”

“Hello,” said Tregan. He remembered the boy. A year before he had been a copy boy. Now he was a district man.

“Wait in there,” the tall man said.

Tregan sat in the captain’s office and waited. Outside he could hear the sharp staccato of the clerk’s typewriter. The clock on the wall beat a monotone. Tregan sank into his thoughts. Suddenly it seemed as though the clock were ticking louder. He started. Fifteen minutes had gone. He looked around. The two detectives were beyond the door, watching him.

“Say, where’s Cap’n Dan? I’m in a hurry.”

“You’ll see him soon enough.”

“Well, tell him I’m in a hurry.”

The minutes passed. A house sergeant came in with a sheaf of papers.

“Say, where’s Cap’n Dan?”

The house sergeant looked at him coldly and walked out without answering. Tregan rose suddenly. There was a tangle about him. What was it? His mind seemed to freeze for a moment. Then the captain walked in. He nodded.

“Hello, Tregan! Sit down.”

“Thanks. How’s things, Cap’n?”

“Just fine. Couldn’t be any better, I don’t suppose. How are things with you?”

“So-so. This and that. Here and there. Nothing much.”

There was a pause.

“What’s on your chest, Captain? Couple of your dirty-heels said you wanted to see me.”

The captain leaned over, panted a little as he reached for a cigar. He lit it slowly.

"Shut the door, Tregan."

Tregan kicked the door closed.

"Now, what do you want to see me about?"

"Don't you know?"

"Me? How should I know?"

"Aw, come on! You know what I wanted to see you for."

Tregan frowned.

"You got me, Cap'n."

"No, I haven't, kid. You know what I want to talk to you about."

"You got me wrong, Cap'n."

"Oh, no, I ain't. I got you right."

Tregan eyed the man closely. All his mental agitation was gone. His mind was racing clearly. He had seen the routine cat-and-mouse procedure too often not to recognize it. But what was wanted of him? He'd watch his step.

"I'm afraid I'm dumb, Captain. I haven't the least idea why you want to talk to me. If there's anything I can tell you, I will, though."

"You haven't the least idea, huh?"

"No, I haven't the least idea."

The momentary anger flashed and was gone. Tregan counselled himself.

"Not the least idea, huh?"

It was no use. This fat cop was going to play it his own way. He seemed to be enjoying it. He was playing a game of checkers and Tregan was blindfold. Well, two could play at the game. He'd have to spit it out sooner or later.

"No, Cap'n, not the least idea."

"Well, he hasn't the least idea."

"I'm afraid he hasn't."

"He's afraid he hasn't."

"You sum up my case with remarkable aptitude."

Score one for him, thought Tregan. He wouldn't repeat that.

"Well, I just want you to cast your mind back and figure out what I'd be wanting you here for."

Tregan smiled.

"Don't have to, Cap'n. My life's an open book."

As he said it his mind was racing.

"So, his life's an open book, huh?"

The circle was swinging back again. Tregan knew the procedure. It was almost sure-fire. It was the beginning of the third degree. First you coaxed the prisoner. Then you repeated his answers like water dropping on a stone, until he broke into open anger. Then you played the "tell it to uncle" line. If that didn't work there was the threat of violence. Always the threat first. Then the actual violence. The strong-arms that beat cruelly. If the prisoner fought, he got twice as much as he gave. When he quit the circle began over again. The coaxing, the irritating, the sympathy, the threat, the violence—over and over. Tregan smiled.

"Look here, Cap'n. If there's something you want to know, ask it. It's no use playing the old come-on game with me. You'll save yourself a lot of time if you do."

"So you can't think of anything I'd want to ask you?"

"I can't, and I'm spreading my hand on the table. If it's anything I've got I'll give it to you. But you can sit there all day repeating my answers and you'll not get a rise out of me."

"I won't, hey?"

"No, you won't, hey."

The captain rose.

"Lookit here, Tregan. You're in a jam. You're in a big jam. And if you don't come clean it's gonna go bad with you. And you won't help yourself by gettin' fresh. So you're gonna sit here and tell me what I want to know."

"All right, but for Christ's sake ask me something so I can give you a straight answer."

"For Christ's sake, hey? I'll for Christ's sake you before I'm through."

He rose and walked to and fro. Then he paused and looked from the window. The clock ticked. Tregan watched it crawl. Five, ten, fifteen minutes. He counselled patience to himself. He would refuse to think of this office—of the policeman. He forced his thoughts to Alice. She would be on the coast now with Richolds. He heard a tread. The captain sat at his desk again.

"All right, Tregan," he said. "I give you your break and you don't want it. Now I'm gonna run this."

"Fine!"

“I suppose you can give me a good account of where you been for the last twenty-four hours.”

“I can.”

“Sure! You newspaper guys are smart.”

“Right!”

“Well, suppose you tell me where you was last night!”

“When last night?”

“Well, suppose you start about six o’clock.”

“Six o’clock, hey? Well, at six I was still working. Left the office about quarter to seven, went up to the automat, ate a tongue on rye and drank a cup of coffee, went back to the office, finished up a job of work for a fellow.”

“What kind of work?”

“A pamphlet he’s getting up. I took it over to him when I’d finished—about ten o’clock. I don’t know exactly.”

“What’s his name?”

“Clair Mansel. He lives at the Lorraine.”

“What time did you get there?”

“I don’t know exactly. You know people don’t go through life noticing the exact minute they’re anywhere just so they’ll be able to testify to it later. Anyhow, I should say it was around ten. He could tell you. We talked up in his place for about an hour, had a couple of highballs, then he gave me a check for the stuff.”

“Got the check here?”

“No, I cashed it this morning.”

“So you cashed it this morning, hey? How much?”

“Two hundred dollars.”

“Whaddya cash it this morning for?”

“Is that against the law?”

“No, go on. You got a bank account?”

“Sure.”

“But you didn’t deposit the check—you cashed it.”

“That’s right. I was cashing it when your dicks found me.”

“All right. Go on.”

“About the check?”

“No, about last night.”

"Well, let's see. I want to get this straight the first time. I dropped over at Bunde's place—no, I dropped in Martelli's first and had a highball. Then I went over to Bunde's."

"Which place?"

"The one on South Fifth. Took a taxi over from Martelli's."

"Anyone you know in Bunde's?"

"Sure, a whole gang. I got there sometime about eleven and we sat around about an hour. Round midnight in comes one of your flatfeet to collect the pay-off and . . ."

"All right, cut that out!"

"Listen, I'm giving you a straight tale. You want an account of what I did and where I went. You're giving me the run-around. You've got me on the spot for something. You won't give me the edge and tell me what it is. I've got a clear conscience, so I know I can't spill anything."

"All right, hard guy. Make it tough for yourself. Go on."

"Well, we're feeling merry, so we hoist three or four into your cop and he gets feeling good. A little after midnight—maybe as late as twelve-thirty—Bunde comes in and tells us to pipe down. Fog-eye Smith gets sort of wild so we get him out. I leave the gang and walk down to the waterfront."

"What you go down there for?"

"For the best reason in the world—although no jury would like it: for no reason whatsoever except I wanted to cool off a little and I walked that way."

"So you were lit?"

"Pretty well."

"All right, go careful. How lit were you?"

"Only so-so. I had too much but I could navigate all right. I know I went down the waterfront way because I took a walk over the bridge. Over the other side—maybe about one or one-thirty, I catch a banana and he drives me home."

"Know the cab number?"

"Don't make me laugh!"

"I'm afraid you ain't gonna do much laughing, young feller. You're in bad."

"Well, you wouldn't want me to cry, would you? If I'm in bad I'm the most carefree man you ever saw."

"All right. Never mind that. Go on."

"Well, I paid off the cab and rolled in—that's all."

"That's all, hey? Tell me all about rolling in and getting up."

"Well, I walked in, got undressed—taking off my coat first and all that—and went right to sleep."

"Right to sleep, hey?"

"Sure. Maybe I went sleep-walking but I don't know."

"And this morning?"

"Well, I woke up tasting sort of brown. I get dressed, walk down to the office, see there's nothing much for me, tell the desk I'm sneaking out for coffee, go up to the automat, stop in at the bank, and I'm cashing the check when your boys stroll in. I suppose they asked the desk for me and cut over to the bank."

"And that's everything you done?"

"Yes, everything, and it can be checked on a dozen times. Now I've told you my little song—suppose you break into your dance and tell me what it's all about."

"You'll find out soon enough. You stay right there a while."

"Mind if I phone my office?"

"You'll phone no one. You sit there."

"O.K. You do the explaining later."

The captain waddled from the room and the clock ticked on inexorably.

It was half an hour later when there was a bustle in the outer room. A young man with pince-nez and the professional busy manner bustled in. The captain followed him and shut the door. For five minutes they ignored Tregan as they bent over papers at the captain's desk. Finally the young man straightened.

"Come here!" he said, curtly.

Tregan rose. He dragged the chair after him and sat beside the desk. The young man eyed him fishily.

"I didn't tell you to bring the chair!"

"Stand up when Mr. Stine talks to you!" roared the captain.

Tregan sat still. It was like the army again. Caught in a system.

"In the first place, I don't know who Mr. Stine is. I don't acknowledge either his right to speak to me or to make me stand in his sacrosanct presence."

"I'm Assistant District Attorney."

"You're fairly new, then. I'm sorry I haven't heard of you. I just want to go on record before you start, though. I've told my song and dance to the captain. I have nothing more to say. If you have any charge against me place it and let me get in touch with a lawyer. If you haven't let me get out of here. If you're in doubt about me call up the D.A. He knows me well enough. And as to standing, I hate to call your attention to it, but I'm slightly lame in one foot and it is quite inconvenient for me to stand."

The young man grinned, fishily.

"We're sorry to hold you, Mr. Tregan, but you see, we have a rather important matter to go into, and we'd like to make sure of your part in it. Of course, we haven't the slightest doubt as to your innocence in the matter."

"Well, then, what's the confusion about? What do you want to know? I've helped the District Attorney a couple of times and I'll help him again if I can. But I can't talk if I don't know what you want to know."

"The captain tells me, Mr. Tregan, that you were cashing a check when you were arrested this morning. Is that so?"

"Oh. . . . I was arrested! That's getting a little light on the subject."

"Perhaps I used the term inadvisedly. Let us say, when you were asked to come here. What I'd like to know is why you cashed that check instead of depositing it."

"Merely because I happened to need some cash."

"Two hundred dollars?"

"So you found out how much it was?"

"We find out everything we want to know, Mr. Tregan."

"Good! You're regular Boy Scouts. Then you can find out why I'm walking out of here right now."

"You'll stay there, young feller!" roared the captain.

"No. You're wrong. Either you come to the point or I walk out. And if I get beat up doing it I'll run you and your blind-tiger racket cockeyed—and I'll spill a few things on the local gang mess that the D.A. won't like. You can't beat me up without something behind it and you've got nothing. You daren't!"

"We daren't, hey?"

"No. . . ."

"Wait a moment, Mr. Tregan. There's no need for anyone to get excited. We can discuss this matter as gentlemen."

"I'm afraid I haven't time."

The young man whispered fiercely with the captain.

"We'd like to take you somewhere else, Mr. Tregan."

"Over to see the D.A. if you like . . . but that's all."

"All right."

The captain struggled into his topcoat and they went to the yard. A bluecoat followed them, sitting ostentatiously next to Tregan. They whirled through the city. It seemed so remote that Tregan could hardly conceive that he had been part of it two hours before. They ground into a Municipal Building yard. A few loafers craned necks as they climbed out.

Through a corridor they went with the bluecoat bringing up the rear. A door was whisked open. Tregan was pushed inside. For a moment he saw nothing in the half-darkness. Then a light snapped on. He saw a crumpled white sheet on marble. He was pushed beside it. Then a hand pulled back the sheet.

"Well, whyn't you say something?"

The voice came from nowhere.

Tregan opened his mouth to speak but no words came.

"Ya don't look very surprised about it."

Again it seemed that the voice came from nowhere. Tregan pulled himself together. Laboringly he forced the muscles of his tongue to function. It was like lifting a great boulder.

"There's nothing very appropriate that one can say in the face of such a shock," he said.

He noticed that his own voice seemed detached too—it came as if from another corner of the room; but the tone had been even. He had managed that.

"Whaddya do it for, huh? Whaddya do it for?"

The voice barked from a dark corner.

"Don't be childish, please," said Tregan. He felt weary. It took all his power to speak. Olivia—that small form—on the slab. The coarseness of the place—the fragile nudity—the vulgarity of exposing that body like a seashell before all these men. The thoughts raced. He stared at the face. So she was dead. It was all gone—all the worry—all the fear. She was dead.

"Cummon! Whaddya do it for?"

Tregan stared at the form. The lines were so childish.

"Never mind it," another voice said. "Take him upstairs."

Hands grabbed him. He was being dragged.

“Go easy on my foot, please,” Tregan began.
“We’ll foot you, you bastard!” someone said.

29

THE silky voice coaxed.

"Now, my boy, I want to help you. I'm sorry they treated you roughly, and I've taken it upon myself to make note of the proceeding that was going on when I came in here. You know that third-degree methods are never countenanced in this department."

Tregan did not look at the face. It had been going on for eighteen hours. The coaxing, then the threat of force, then the force. The rubber hose had been applied expertly. That was the worst part of it. He could beat them at the mental game—but the physical pain racked him. He couldn't stand that. But he wouldn't let them know it.

"I've been through it all before," he said, dully. "I know nothing about it and so I can't say anything. You can beat me up till Christ comes and I couldn't tell you any more if I wanted."

"Of course, Mr. Tregan. But you realize that we must get to the bottom of these matters."

"Beat 'em up till they come across, hey?"

"I'm very sorry that that occurred. You know, as a newspaperman, that it does occur, unfortunately, when no one in real authority is about. But I am not trying to force anything from you. I am acting as your friend. The officers who took part in any physical violence toward you will have to answer for it. I'll see to that. I'll have none of it while I'm in authority at headquarters. It has been done without my knowledge, I assure you.

"All I wish is to get a clear statement from you. You are tired and I hesitate to trouble you now—but we must get this case cleared quickly. You can appreciate that. I want you to make a clean breast of it and I'll see that you get every legal consideration. You are a young man—not unlike my own son, if I may say so. Now won't you save yourself trouble and make a clean breast?"

Tregan almost laughed aloud. His mind raced over the words. Save himself trouble! That was in a smutty limerick. To save himself trouble he—what was it? No matter. He'd better keep his mind on this nanny-goat.

"I suppose," said Tregan, "that you are also opposed to starving a man against whom there is no charge—and against keeping a suspect awake until he confesses just to get a wink of sleep. In fact, you would be shocked to hear that I'm thirsty."

"Mr. Tregan, I said I was your friend. I'll prove that."

Tregan heard a buzzer sound. A door opened.

"Sergeant," said the oily voice, "I want you to bring me some food here immediately. Get me some sandwiches and plenty of hot coffee. Bring it right away."

The door closed. Hardly a full minute had passed when the door opened again. Tregan almost laughed again. How clumsy even the big boys were! The tray must have been waiting outside. The meal was a frame as everything else had been. It was a high-pressure version of the sympathy stunt. The smell of the coffee made him ravenous. He saw that the tray had been placed beyond his reach. The sergeant was holding it ready to snatch it away. He must work carefully.

"Now, Mr. Tregan, I'm sure you wouldn't mind telling me all about it before you eat. Then you can have lots of time for your meal."

The coffee smelled like heaven. Tregan almost cried aloud in impatience. He would go slowly. But the coffee smelled so good. He was famished. He would fake some story and then get it. But no . . . that wouldn't do. If he never ate again he wouldn't be licked. It wasn't telling the truth that mattered—it was winning this fight. They couldn't lick him.

"Oh, is the food here?" Tregan said. "I'm afraid I feel a little weak. Perhaps I'd be able to talk better as I eat."

"Naw ya don't!" the sergeant rasped.

"Sergeant, please!" said the smooth voice. "You may leave the tray."

The footsteps retreated and the door slammed. The coffee's smell eddied over the desk. Tregan did not look up.

"Certainly, Mr. Tregan," the smooth voice went on. "You shall eat all you wish. Just drink a good cup of coffee now. Plenty of coffee will do you good."

Clumsy again, thought Tregan. That "plenty of coffee" gave the game away. He had seen men babble in a coffee jag down on the waterfront. When you were hungry it was just like getting a shot of cocaine. You talked a blue streak. He'd take one cup.

He reached out and sipped it slowly. The warmth was intoxicating. He wanted to gulp down more. He put down the cup, only half-emptied. His head began to nod. He must remember not to drink any more. He reached for a sandwich and began chewing it. The voice flowed on like treacle.

"Now, Mr. Tregan, I'm sure you are a man of sense. You don't want to cause yourself unnecessary trouble. If you'd only give me the true version of

the—er, unfortunate happening."

"I'm sorry, but I told all I know. I don't know how it happened."

His head began to slip from his hands. His eyes smarted from the white light that had been thrown on him continuously for the eighteen hours. A hand tugged at his shoulder. The voice was so friendly.

"But, my dear boy, don't you see? I'm trying to save you trouble. I'm afraid if you won't talk to me the case will be taken from my hands and given to someone else. And there is always the possibility that unorthodox methods will be used on you. You don't realize that I am about the only one here who wishes to treat you in a friendly manner."

Tregan almost grinned again. There it was. The circle. Sympathy, coaxing, then the gentle hint of the mailed fist under the glove, then the threat of violence, then the violence, the torture, then the transition back to pleading.

"Won't you talk plainly to me?"

Tregan sat erect and looked at the man for the first time. It was a jolly face he saw. Like that of a shaven Santa Claus. The man could play kind uncle parts in any Hollywood film.

"Now please talk plainly."

"All right," said Tregan.

The buzzer sounded. A policeman with pencil and notebook took his place in a corner.

"You ask me to talk plainly, and I'll do so," said Tregan. "I want you to know first that I am as familiar with routine on questioning as you are. I know that you are as much part of the system as the strong-arm men that beat me before you came in. I do not doubt in the slightest that you wish to be kind to me. I know that you have been kind. Yet I can add not one word to what I have already said, for there is no other version of what I've done."

"Don't record that, Martin," said the old man.

He looked at Tregan quizzically for the space of a minute.

"You won't change that?"

"I can't."

"I'm sorry."

"Excuse me before you go. You must believe I am innocent. I can only give you proof in this way. I know that most of the line you pulled here was smooth guff. You're picked for it. I know that when you go I'll get beaten up again. Knowing that, wouldn't it be sensible to suppose that if I were guilty, I should confess to you and save myself torture? You're a sensible man. You

know I'd confess to anyone who had treated me decently rather than to those gorillas that were in here. You know that, don't you?"

The man looked at him blankly.

"I know nothing whatsoever about it," he said, and walked out. He called out to someone as he went through the door.

"Give him the works, boys!" he said.

The figures swarmed into the room. Someone snapped Tregan's head back so that the light fell on it.

"Come on, you bastard! Now come clean or we'll slap the goddam daylights out of you! Why did you do it?"

"I didn't . . ." Tregan began.

Another hand grasped him by the hair and yanked his head around.

"Don't lie, goddam you, you did!"

"I didn't!"

Another form leaned over the desk. A fist flourished before Tregan's face.

"Now listen, bozo! I'm gonna ask you one thing and if you don't tell the truth I'll sock you to hellanback! Whaddya want to kill that girl for?"

"I didn't. . . ."

Another hand grabbed him. He was pulled back and forth. It began to be a nightmare of repetition. Someone grasped him by the throat and pulled him from his seat. Another hand yanked him down again. Tregan droned a steady denial. His mind went soaring away. He must remember not to give in—that was important. He could always think about Alice. Alice and he went swimming in the quarry. Her hair was like corn. Once she came down the staircase in her home and he had looked up at her.

"Cummon! Answer, goddam you!"

He wouldn't answer. It was no use. If he said nothing he wouldn't make a mistake. He must think of something else. On that balcony the snow had drifted down. He had been close to her. It was nice to remember that. He could hold on to that thought warmly for a while.

"Answer, goddam you, when the cap'n talks to you!"

"Whaddya do it for?"

They had both thought of *Bohême* as they stood on that loggia. Her hand had touched his.

"Answer, you sonovabitch!"

A thousand lights blazed in a heliotrope sky as a hard hand smashed Tregan across the face. He tasted blood in his mouth. It must have cut his lip. He rose. He had been knocked over the chair. He'd show them! He walked slowly toward the light. A face bent near him. Tregan struck out with all his strength. It felt good. He was fighting. He could fight them all.

"Give him the works, boys!"

The blows beat down. They were crushing him. His arms were so numb that he could hardly lift them. He was going to sleep.

He awoke with a jump. He was back in the chair again. One of his eyes wouldn't open. So he had lost his head again. He mustn't do that. He must concentrate—keep his head clear.

There was a steady pounding on his knee.

"Whaddya do it for, Tregan? Whaddya do it for? Whaddya do it for? Whaddya do it for?"

Each time the question came the fist dropped on his knee.

"Whaddya do it for?"

It was getting harder and harder. Each time the weight of the blow was increasing. He must do something—pull his knee away sharply. He was too tired to do it, he found. He must think of something. That night—walking through the park. The lights faded.

"You bastard! You knocked her up and then you knifed her!"

Where was he? Oh, that night. The snow had been deep. He had walked through the park. The niggers had swung in unison. I got rhythm. That was a song. I got rhythm, you got rhythm; I got rhythm and all God's chillun got wings.

It was hours later. It must be. They were still there. A hand slapped his face.

"Answer, goddam you! Who are these dames?"

The photos from his wall. They must have pulled them down. There was Alice. They had Joan, too. What did it matter? He wouldn't talk. He'd never say anything. Never. I got rhythm. Gee, the moon is yaller; here's a sarsparellah, how'd you like to kiss my neck? Someone was still pounding on his knee. The salt taste in his mouth. They were slapping his face again. It didn't matter. He was too tired. He could go to sleep. They couldn't wake him now.

30

THE next day the newspaper offices clattered with sound. Typewriters pecked endlessly. The Morkrum machines chattered so continually that they merged themselves into a dull roar.

The last of a long line of Kings resigned in favor of a republic. Three men adrift in a boat were picked up off Hatteras after thirteen days at sea. A police squad raided a lottery agency in the City Hall. A famous financial man was killed in a plane crash. A notorious procuress was found murdered on the edge of a pond in the park. Sixteen girls were hustled by police from the gates of a mill and charged with picketing and suspicion as reds.

The police raided a club frequented only by millionaires of the oldest families and found each locker had its quota of forbidden liquids. Sixteen miners were trapped in a falling tunnel of a coal mine. A German confessed to a murder committed twenty years before. A new opera star shrilled through the mad scene of *Lucia* while two thousand of the elite sat breathless, ready to break into sycophantic applause.

The baseball team started South for annual training. Six bandits forced three workers at a branch bank into the safe and escaped with $50,000. Three second-story men were arrested on charges preferred by a fourteen-year-old girl. A man named Tregan confessed that he had stabbed to death a pregnant girl and was being held awaiting the Coroner's Jury.

31

THE rancid smell of dirty bodies mingled with the odor of disinfectant. The heavy shoes of a keeper sounded along the corridor. His keys jangled as he unlocked the cell door.

"Cummon out," he said to Tregan.

Tregan limped out. The man swung along the corridor, through the cell-block gate, to the warden's office. He knocked. An answer came. He opened the door and propelled Tregan in. In a leather chair Alice was sitting. The chair stood on a patterned Brussels carpet. They said nothing.

"I'll give you five minutes," said the warden. The sunlight glinted on his bald head as he rose. Tregan heard the door close. He couldn't look up. He spread his hands over his face. She was walking toward him. He could hear it. She was touching his shoulder. He pulled it away as a child would do.

"Don't touch me," he said. It was hard to talk.

"Why not, Tree?"

"I'm so dirty. It's dirty in there."

"Tree," she said, "I've left Harry."

"You shouldn't have done that."

"But I love you, Tree."

"I know. Don't let's talk about it."

"I wanted to tell you."

"Everything's so messed up."

"It will all be straightened out."

"You don't think I did it—it's important!"

"Of course not!"

"I don't know what happened. She was in trouble—you know. She asked me to help her. I put it off and I guess she got so depressed she stabbed herself with a knife. You believe that?"

"Of course."

"No—there was hardly anything else you could answer. I shouldn't have asked."

"Tree—I came here. I know you couldn't have done it. Why, you're a baby."

"Everyone else believes I did."

"How do you know?"

"No one came here."

"They couldn't. I had to get father to do all sorts of things to get me in."

"Oh, yes, your father's a big shot."

"Don't say things like that, Tree. It hurts me a little."

"I'm sorry. It seems that everything I say to you I have to be sorry for."

The clock ticked.

"What are you doing about this case?"

"Nothing."

"You'll have to fight hard."

"No I won't. I didn't do it. I can just tell the truth. I'll merely explain."

"Have you a lawyer?"

"I don't want one."

"You're still more of a baby. You can't explain away that confession."

"I'll just say I don't remember making it. I was determined not to say anything. I guess they just beat it out of me—it must have been like talking in my sleep. I made up my mind they wouldn't lick me—and they didn't. Not while I was conscious. I thought about . . . well, it doesn't matter. It's a mess."

"But you'll have to have a lawyer."

"I don't want one. I can tell the truth."

"But you've got to have a lawyer in a murder case. You should know that. And you've got to plead not guilty. It's the law."

"Maybe I won't be held when I tell the story straight."

"No, you'll be held. You know who the girl was."

"How do you mean?"

"You know that her father is in the State Department of Venezuela? There's merry hell to pay in Washington."

"That makes it . . ."

"It makes it all the worse for you. You've got to have a lawyer. I'll get my father to take care of it."

"But he's a corporation lawyer."

"I know. He hasn't had a criminal case for thirty years or so. But he'll do something."

"I haven't any money."

"But I have—that's one of the fortunate phases."

“Your money! I’ve got to be a sort of gigolo.”

“Yes, just a gigolo,” she said. She smiled.

He smiled too for the first time.

“That goes to close harmony,” he said.

There was another pause.

“You really don’t think I did it? That’s important.”

“I don’t believe it. I never did for a moment.”

“Well, then, it’s all right.”

They waited again.

“Please go,” he said. “I don’t like you to look at me now.”

“Don’t mind, Tree. I see what I want to see. I love you.”

“Let’s not talk about that. I feel filthy. I don’t want to think of you and love and this”—he waved his hand—“in the same thought. When you go don’t touch me.”

“I won’t,” she said.

“I suppose the five minutes are gone,” Tregan added.

“Yes, I’ll be going. Everything will be all right.”

“Sure,” said Tregan. “Everything will turn out all right, I guess.”

The door closed behind her. Tregan stood still waiting for the warden.

32

TREGAN sat quietly. He watched the dust-motes swirling in the spring sunlight that slanted through the windows. He wondered if it harmed your lungs to breathe all that in. You must breathe it all the time—yet you only knew of it when the sun shone.

He felt vaguely that he'd been over all that before. It was long ago—in the classroom of Dr. Rex's Academy for the Sons of English Gentlemen. This was like the classroom again—the large room, the slanting sun, the unhealthy air of institutionalism, the crowded bodies jammed together.

He looked out over the courtroom. Along the front rows the reporters bent over improvised pine tables. They scribbled away and messenger boys passed along the rows, hurrying the copy out to the telegraph battery especially installed. There was Mehlie of the *Star*, Jameson of the *Advocate*. He knew them both—good reporters. His gaze drifted to the courtroom. Every seat was taken. He watched a girl in a red hat—her jaws rose and fell mechanically to Mr. Wrigley's cud.

He felt peculiarly detached. Was this how the victim felt at a big trial? It was a big trial. The day before he had seen a tabloid sticking from a man's pocket. He couldn't see the whole headline—just the end: "AS STORK CHEAT SLAYER". That was him—Llewellyn Tregan.

Yet he couldn't feel that it was he. He was still Llewellyn Tregan—and he used to pick harebells in a country lane. He couldn't make himself believe that it was the same Llewellyn Tregan sitting in this chair; the man who was going slowly closer and closer to the electric chair.

It wasn't any use thinking about the trial any more. He had been through it all. The nights in the cell—then days—then more nights. The Coroner's hearing; the indictment; the decision against him; the long waiting; the swearing in of the jury; the dreary monotones; the testimony.

The girl in the red hat—was she thrilled by seeing him—a potential slayer? She chewed gum. Now you take gum. Where should you take it—and how far? Would people follow it if you took it anywhere? And jurymen. Why is a juryman? What God-given right has he to judge his fellowman? Jurywomen, too. One jurywoman on the jury. She looked at him with horror all day long. She believed in all those things—chastity, seduction, the purity of American womanhood. Well, why the hell not? Take trials, what good are they? Would this one do any good? He would suddenly be dead in the

electric chair. What did it matter? Fifty years from now he would be dead anyway. It was all the same. He couldn't care. It was more important to brush your hair neatly.

Fellowes, the lawyer, had said as much. "We've got to make a good impression." What's an impression? Learn to play the piano in ten lessons. When I first called the waiter they laughed but when I asked him for *filet mignon aux champignons* they gasped in amazement. Can you gasp in amazement? Can you gasp not in amazement? What the world needs is a good five-cent gasp!

Take gasps. Take wasps. Take asps. Cleopatra was stung by an asp. It might have been a wasp at that. My mistake. Typograhpical error. Dele double-you. Follow copy. Etaoin shrdlu. The prisoner, Etaoin Shrdlu, was charged with cwmbyx. He was sentenced to querty.

He started. They were calling his name.

"Llewellyn Tregan!"

Fellowes was looking at him. The courtroom rustled and gasped. A woman called something. The messenger boys scurried. The Judge's hammer fell—heavily—like the beating on his knee, Tregan thought, up in that police chamber. Hush—the Judge was speaking.

"If there are any further breaches of decorum I shall order the courtroom cleared!"

Clear the courtroom . . . clear the deck—no, he mustn't think like that. He was walking forward. Poor Fellowes, he looked worried. Fellowes was worrying more than he was. Fellowes didn't want him to die. He wasn't worrying about it. In the war he hadn't wanted to die. He had fought it, bitterly. Now—no, he didn't want to die. He couldn't make himself feel there was any danger. Here was the stand.

"Raise your right hand!"

The clerk stood before him. He lifted his hand.

"Ya promise to tell th' truth an' nothin' but the truth-selp-ya-gawd-siddown!"

Tregan nodded. He smiled at the gabble. The Judge was looking. He was frowning. That was a bad move. He mustn't smile. All these people in this rigmarole wanted him to be serious. It was just like an audience all expecting the star to do right by the box office. An act—that was it. He'd better act. Get all his senses together, concentrate on every nuance, answer, word, expression, like a game. Fellowes was advancing to him.

"Your name?"

There, it had started. The house was jammed to capacity for the opening night. The curtain rose on a scene in court. The president tossed out the first ball.

"Llewellyn Tregan."

"And you live?"

The answers came and fell mechanically.

"You remember the events of Thursday, February 13?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because every detail of it has been gone over in questioning since that day."

"Suppose you tell us, very carefully, everything you did that day."

"That day only?"

"Well, from the time you rose that day until the time you went to sleep __"

"—the following morning?"

"Yes, the following morning."

"I rose about nine in the morning. . . ."

There, that started it. Fellowes had been over it with him a dozen times. Just what he should say. It sounded silly and stilted—but that was what he had to say. Fellowes had been worried at first lest he should forget some of it. Forget! He could hear any speech once and give it almost verbatim within the next ninety-six hours. Then he forgot it. It was an old reportorial habit.

There he was, his mind was wandering again. The words had been falling regularly. He was still on the right track.

"And the following morning?" Fellowes was asking.

"I rose as usual, bathed as usual, went to the office as usual. Then I told someone at the office that I was going out for coffee. I stopped on the way to cash a check. The Fifteenth District detectives stopped me and took me to the station. From there I was moved to headquarters. I was questioned for about thirty-four hours consecutively. I understand that I signed a confession. I have no memory of making or signing any confession."

"Then you can throw no light whatsoever upon the death of Olivia Mendoza?"

"As God is my judge, I have no knowledge of the death of this harmless girl for whom I had nothing but pity and tender affection."

"Thank you!"

Fellowes was smiling. That last bit hadn't been in the rehearsal—but it had gone over well. What the hell did it matter anyhow? He meant it. Good or bad it was the truth—and good or bad it wouldn't bring Olivia back again. Her body had looked so small and pure on the slab of gleaming stone. She was beyond worrying now—all this—this mess—she was out of it.

33

THE prosecuting attorney stepped forward.

"Mr. Tregan," he began, "you are a newspaperman?"

"Yes."

"You have been a newspaperman for ten years past?"

"Since the war, yes."

"You drink?"

"Sometimes."

"You do not have ordinary ideas on life—that is, the commonly accepted ideas."

"I don't know what the commonly accepted ideas are."

"Home—marriage—bringing up a family—working hard—being a good citizen."

"I don't know what you mean. It would take me several hours to expound in any adequate form such sociological theories as I have."

"I object to this irrelevant questioning, Your Honor." It was Fellowes.

The prosecuting attorney turned to the Judge. He adjusted pince-nez carefully. Tregan was wondering why all district attorneys went in for pince-nez glasses.

"Your Honor," started the attorney, "this questioning is not irrelevant. We propose to show in this case that unusual psychological backgrounds prepared the way for this crime—that the prisoner was a man who cared for no law except his own, and that this disregard of what we look upon as accepted decencies in life led him to murder a young and innocent girl in cold blood. The fact that the victim was not an American maiden should not deter us from—"

"Objection overruled. Proceed, please."

The Prosecutor had put in several good punches to the jury's heart. Tregan watched the expression of loathing spread like a storm cloud over the face of the woman member of the jury.

"In other words, then," the Prosecutor said, turning back to Tregan, "your general mode of living might be termed bohemian."

"It might if your vocabulary was impoverished."

"What do you mean by that?"

“Many things. Among them, exactly what I say. The word is neither appropriate nor accurate.”

“In what way is it inaccurate?”

“Oh, a bohemian in general implies a follower of the arts who usually subsists in poverty and a great deal of dirt because he’s too lazy to take the art without the grime. Personally I fail to qualify because I refuse to live in poverty. I work hard for a living, and I like to live decently. If I may help, why not substitute the word ‘individualist’. It’s a cheap phrase that will serve as a peg to hang an argument on.”

“As an individualist—I use your word, Mr. Tregan—your general idea was to run life to suit yourself.”

“That is as nearly true as a generalization can be.”

“And in your scheme of things women were as everything else—you handled them to suit yourself.”

“Again, perhaps, a generalization that is only partial truth.”

“You equivocate. Answer yes or no.”

“You ask me to answer yes or no on a question that couldn’t be covered fully in several hundred volumes. Isn’t that hard?”

“Answer yes or no, as I request!”

“Please frame the question again, then.”

“In your philosophy, or whatever it is, of life, women ranked only as things to enjoy, didn’t they?”

“No, not ex . . .”

“Your answer is no. And yet you have heard on this witness stand women who declared that you had accepted all they had to give—had stolen it from them by argument and guile and force—and yet you deny that you look on women only as things upon which to base your passion!”

“Not women. There was *one* woman so testified,” Tregan said, smiling.

“Why do you smile?”

“Because I thought your last phrase about passion was like a ten-cent melodrama appeal to the jury.”

The Judge rapped with his gavel.

“Mr. Tregan,” he said, angrily. “This is no place for ill-occasioned levity and sarcasm. It is a serious court of justice and you are facing a serious charge.”

“May I reply, Your Honor?”

“You may.”

“Your Honor, I fully realize that I am on trial—and that it is my neck that is at risk. Am I then denied the right to use every artifice, worthy or cheap, to save myself just as this Prosecutor is utilizing every wile to make me look like a scoundrel? His present attempt is one to show me as a profligate, perhaps a sexual pervert. My background has been perhaps that of any man. I have done things I have been ashamed of and things I have been sorry for, but that is not uncommon. I am here, tried for murder, and as far as the case itself goes I will aid the Prosecutor in any way I can and will tell him the truth on all specific matters that I can answer positively. Excuse this outburst, but I am very weary mentally.”

“Proceed, Mr. Harnan, please,” declared the Judge.

“You are married, Mr. Tregan?”

So he had dug that up!

“Yes, sir.”

“Any children?”

“Yes, one.”

“Are you divorced?”

“No.”

“Where is your wife living now?”

“She’s dead.”

“When did she die?”

“While I was in France—during the war.”

The coating of horror began to vanish from the face of the woman juror. The Prosecutor sensed the change. He didn’t want the prisoner to get that ex-veteran sympathy.

“Where is your child now?”

“I don’t know exactly.”

“Have you ever cared for it?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know?”

“I mean that I have never seen the child. My wife’s parents have always cared for it in England. I don’t know why I have never wished to see it.”

“In other words, you have failed to play the part of a father and support your own child as a good father should.”

Tregan became weary. How could he explain all that to this calloused little man in front of all these people? The girl with the red hat was still chewing her gum. The woman juror was staring at him in outraged indignation again. The men at the pine benches were scribbling.

"If you wish it," Tregan said, "I have been a bad father—a bad anything you say."

What was the use of continuing? By sheer heaviness the Prosecutor would win each point. He would weary Tregan until Tregan would be tired of thinking about the matter—let him have his own way just to get rid of the tiresomeness of it all.

At that moment Tregan knew that he had lost his case. Eventually the jury would bring in a verdict of guilty and the judge would sentence him to the electric chair. It didn't seem to matter very much. He decided not to fight the case consciously any more. He would think of Alice.

34

IT was on the twelfth day of the trial that the strange thing occurred. The gavel had fallen for a temporary recess. The courtroom buzzed with a hundred conversations. The summations to the jury were to begin soon.

Tregan closed his eyes wearily. The darkness seemed to make his hearing more acute. He began idly to sort out the conversations.

"Where in hell's that pencil?" A reporter behind him was fuming. "Damn you light-fingered crooks round here! That's four pencils in two days some of you have lifted!"

"I'd give exactly ten cents for his chance. . . ."

"He sez to me: 'That's a corking good lead you had yesterday. Good stuff,' he sez."

"Tregan! *Écoute!*"

Tregan whirled quickly. It was Joan's voice. She was speaking to him in French. And yet she was turned toward the girl beside her—another newspaperwoman. Tregan stared in a puzzled way for a second.

"*Bon œuf*," he heard Joan say. It must be meant for him. Once they had had a silly way of turning American slang words into French. She was continuing, still gazing intently at the girl beside her as if in animated conversation.

"Tregan. *On dit que sans question tu es fini. Écoute bien. A midi demande aux gendarmes de te conduire au lavabo. Derrière le miroir se trouve la clef de la porte de la chambre de documents. Ouvre la porte, sors par la grande porte du sud-ouest. Là, je t'attends. Comprends-tu?*"

Tregan turned and smiled. Her eyes swept past and caught his. It was understood.

So they had planned an escape for him! That was too silly—just like the Prisoner of Zenda. You didn't do that in real life. And yet—you never got tried for murder in real life. It never happened to people—not real people. Only to people you read about in books and tabloids. And if this trial were a piece of fiction that had touched Llewellyn Tregan, why not an escape by another piece of fiction?

He considered carefully. He was to ask the guards at the noon recess to take him to the washroom. He'd done that before. They merely took him into an anteroom that had once been a judge's retiring room and stayed there

—one stood by the door and the other by the window. He was to enter the small bathroom of the anteroom, partially close the door, pick up the key behind the mirror, open the door to the record room.

That door had been closed for years. It had been closed back in the days when the City Hall reporters had formed the habit of rushing through the record room to the little washroom. Judge Hoffenbach had stopped that. He had had the door locked to keep the reporters from using his washroom.

Yet how had Joan got that key? How had she got it behind the mirror? It didn't sound possible. It was silly. Yet someone might have helped her—some of the fellows on the papers.

Yet supposing he opened that record room door? He'd have to walk through the record room and sometimes there was an old clerk there. Then he'd have to go through the reporters' room—an evil-looking place with gross cartoons of city officials and bawdy phrases lampooning them chalked all over the walls. And there were always reporters there who would see him.

But supposing they were in on it—all of them! That was it! Like a flash the solution hit him. It was the biggest news story of the year—a man condemned to the electric chair in a hot murder case was news—but for that man to walk out of the building a free man—to escape under the officials' noses, that was bigger news. It would be a sensation. The administration would get hell. And what paper in town didn't want that gang to get merry hell? Only one little morning sheet supported them—and that one sheet was live enough to be ready for a good sensational story.

Someone had engineered the thing. It was a great news stunt—just like the time Mac on the *Globe* burned the sheep bones in the furnace of the deserted house and had the police hunting a mystery murder fiend for two whole weeks.

Yet why should he provide the story? He could stand the gaff. But the decision was going against him. Tregan knew that. He had seen the jury—read their faces. Even Fellowes' cheerful "It doesn't look so bad" had been a little too hearty recently. Fellowes knew he was done for. So did the newspapermen.

He was enough of a newspaperman himself to know that. He'd watched too many trials. There was the Birch-Langdorff trial. He had known all through that they would be convicted. And the Wills trial. He had seen that acquittal coming as if he'd ordered it.

Tregan was thinking like a newspaperman again. He had made a bad defense at the trial. His was the blame. He had scorned to act his part. And

the prosecution had done a good job. He knew that. All the rest of the newspapermen must have known it. And he was one of them. They had gone to bat for him. Not entirely disinterestedly, no doubt. They would be glad to see him walk out of the building—if his theory was correct—and they would be glad to get a red hot story.

But that only happened in books. People didn't go through heroic stunts like that in real life. He'd forget the whole thing.

Yet for the first time the morning dragged. The impassioned speeches to the jury sounded; he didn't hear them. He wasn't going to try to escape—yet it was a corking good plan. He could imagine himself writing the lead on that:

"Walking calmly out of court under the very noses of civic officialdom, Llewellyn Tregan, accused of the love nest murder of Olivia Mendoza, is at large to-day. . . ."

His mind played with the story—yet he wouldn't do it. That much he had decided. He would attend to the case. He listened, trying to make his conscious self absorb the meaning of each word, just as, when a child, he had tried to make himself conscious of every word in his oft-repeated prayers.

The gavel fell for the noon recess. He saw Joan hurry from her seat. It was a silly scheme. It couldn't happen to him—and yet he heard himself with surprise saying to the guard:

"Take me over to the men's room for a minute, Jim."

"O.K., kid," Jim said.

They left by the side door, walked over to the little anteroom. Jim stopped at the door. The other guard stationed himself by the window.

"Make it snappy, kid!" said Jim.

I'm not doing anything about the plan, Tregan thought. I'm just going to the washroom because I want to. I'd do this anyhow, plan or no plan.

He half-closed the door behind him, carefully leaving it well ajar. Quickly he felt behind the mirror. It wasn't there—yes it was—a small fluted key.

He looked round the tiled walls, walked to the opposite door, turned it, opened it, closed it quietly behind him, walked through the stillness of the record room. The door to the reporters' room was open.

If anyone was there!

He strode in boldly. He was aware that the City Hall gang were all there. They were all pecking merrily at typewriters.

“Here, old sock!”

He found a cap jammed over his head. Someone was putting his arms into an overcoat.

“Try not to limp too goddamned much.”

It was over. He was in the long corridor. He mustn’t limp. Would anyone look at him? Was this escaping?—this silly walk down the corridor, down the imitation marble steps, out the southwest entrance where the begrimed caryatid maidens strained eternally under their load of several million tons apiece.

This couldn’t be escaping—this walk across the street. He saw Joan standing beside a closed sedan.

“Jump in!” she said.

They wheeled out into the traffic.

“We did it!” she cried.

35

HEGERMAN, in the back seat, grinned like an obscene panhandler.

"All my idea, my boy," he chattered. "They called it silly—but you see, it worked."

So it was a crazy invention of Hegerman's. It could only have been created by a lopsided mind.

"It's all very silly," said Tregan. He turned to Joan. "Watch how you drive!"

His heart should have been pounding. He had always read of how escaping men's hearts pounded madly. He had written of pounding hearts. His own wasn't pounding. He felt no elation at all. The thing didn't gee up—that was all. Either he was still Llewellyn Tregan on trial for life and dreaming about this—or else he was Llewellyn Tregan, a reporter, just riding about his work and all that trial had never existed. The latter seemed the best idea. He never had gone through that horrible nightmare. It was a bad dream. All this was real.

Commonplaces were jabbing him as he rode along.

"I see they're getting right along with the new subway."

Joan laughed hysterically. "What a thing to say! And Goldmark is making plenty of graft on it. Listen to sense, Tree! You're free, and you've got to stay free. That gang would have convicted you for sure."

"I know," he said. "I felt it myself."

"I'm taking you down to Pier 19. It's all fixed for you. You're sailing as one of the crew this afternoon."

The car turned by the produce markets. The smell of decaying fish rose mightily. It, for the first time, roused Tregan to a sense of reality.

The car turned into a pier warehouse. The afternoon light seeped in weakly from grimy windows. There were piles of bales and boxes. A hundred alien smells rose up. The car stopped.

"Walk up that gangplank and ask for Mr. Correggio," Joan said. "He knows all about it."

He limped up the sloping ramp. A figure in peaked cap and soiled dungarees took him by the arm. Through musty gangways, smelling of oil, under an engine shaft, to a small wooden door. The man opened it. A blast

of cold air swept out striking Tregan in the face. Part of some refrigeration system.

"You shall wait here a little time until to-morrow," said the man. He closed the door. Almost immediately Tregan heard the screaming of winches. The steel plates on his tiny cubicle began to vibrate gently. They were sailing. He had done it—he was really free! Everyone had been for him—the gang had stood by him. He felt suddenly miserable.

It was then he realized that he'd never stopped to say goodbye to Joan.

36

"HOW about a drop o' Scotch?"

Tregan stepped into the cabin. The place seemed like a cool haven after the terrific heat of the engine room. Two long bunks gleamed with white linen under the light from the portholes. Overhead the ovate ventilators whistled with a draft of cool air. Beyond, a bathroom glistened white—like that of a first-class liner.

Tregan thought how good it would seem to stand under a cold shower.

"I'd rather take a shower if that's all right by you."

"Sure, lad! Go ahead. Lots of clean towels in there."

Tregan stripped and jumped under the spray. The soap seemed like an unctuous blessing on his skin. He hadn't imagined it could feel like that.

"Better slip these on when you're dry."

The chief engineer handed him khaki overalls. The hundreds of launderings that they'd undergone had turned them almost like white drill.

"You won't need any underwear down in this heat," the chief said. His voice vibrated with the burr of the Clyde.

"You're Scotch, aren't you?"

"You wouldn't think a man by the name of McBaine was Italian, would you?"

Tregan laughed. He liked this fellow McBaine.

"I'm a Britisher myself."

McBaine laughed this time.

"You should tell me," he said. "You can stay forty years in the States and you can't lose an honest accent. And as if your name wasn't enough. From Devon way or Cornwall."

" 'By Pol, Tre and Pen; you shall know the Cornish men,' " quoted Tregan.

He felt suddenly alive—sitting there in clean clothes in the decency of this cabin.

"Nice place you have here."

"Why not?" the chief grinned. "A first-class engineer these days is entitled to first-class consideration. Not, mind you, that I think too much o'

meself. But you've got to have decent living quarters when you sail these waters. The heat soon knocks you under. How about that drink?"

"Fine!"

"Soda?"

"Right!"

"Well, three cheers!"

"Thanks!"

It felt good being a human thing again. For a second Tregan remembered the courtroom—the little Prosecutor shaking his finger and the dust-motes swirling in the sunbeams just as they'd done at Dr. Rex's School. He put the thought away quickly. Dr. Rex and his School for Young British Gentlemen was behind and dead. So was that trial. Neither of them had ever existed. This was a new life.

"Thank you, chief! I guess I'll be running along. It's been nice having ten minutes . . ."

"Don't go. It's no use you goin' below for you're no use down there. Don't look sad. You'll never make a good greaseball in one trip."

McBaine looked at him intently.

"Are you a . . ." he paused.

"Go ahead," Tregan said.

"Are you a believer in Communism?"

"I don't know," said Tregan. "I think I am."

"What do you mean, you think you are?" the chief roared.

Tregan looked at the bookshelf above the bunk. He could see Marx, beside it a battered Schopenhauer, after that Hergesheimer's *Cytherea*. What a collection for a tropical fruit ship!

"I mean I'd like to know something about it. I feel that what we read in American papers is only one side—and what the ardent supporters of Russia say is one side. It's somewhere in between—I'd want to see for myself. One thing I know. I don't think we're getting along any too well under our present system of capitalistic procedure. But I know too that most of the ardent dirty-neck Communists in America fill me with loathing. I want to find out for myself."

"A pretty good answer," laughed McBaine. "You ought to be a politician the way you straddle a fence."

Tregan laughed. "You're somewhat of a politician, yourself, chief."

“Nay, I’m only a Scot that has to take all the worries of a ship on my shoulders. Every last part aboard that turns is mine to watch—and all the johnny on the bridge has to do is say: ‘Mr. McBaine, can we get a little more headway?’ He doesn’t sit down here like I do figuring for the owners how much oil I’ve used, how much I should have used, how much I might save. It’s a grand, important job, being a chief engineer.”

“Perhaps you were fated for it, chief. Tell me, why does every chief engineer have to be a Scotsman.”

“Ah, lad, that’s a simple one that puzzles lots of people. It’s just because we make all the good engines up on the Clyde. And where you make them, there’s where you’ll find the men that know them and understand them. All my lads below, all those assistants, they’re all Scots, too. Why? Because I like the Scots? Not at all! I’m an international. But it’s only up by the Clyde that I can find a man who’s got an inkling of an idea about how we’re stuck together below deck.”

“You’re still a politician, though, chief,” smiled Tregan. “For instance, you were going to ask me something a while back, but you changed it. You said: ‘Are you a ——?’ and then you stopped and put in a question on Communism. What were you going to ask?”

“I was about to ask you if you were an absconder, lad,” said McBaine, quickly. “Then I minded me that it was none of my business.”

Why should he tell anyone about that? What did it matter?

“No. It was something about a woman. A girl died. It wasn’t as tawdry as that sounds—or maybe it was. How did you know I wasn’t a regular hand—maybe a college man shipping out for a vacation?”

“I’ve seen too many of you to know.”

“You mean lots of people escape the country all the time?”

“Not so much on other lines—but to Central America, yes. You see, we touch at Honduras—and that’s the country with no extradition laws. You get there, and you’re safe.”

“And you’re used to handling criminals like myself?”

“Not at all! Most of them are a cocky lot. You’re a nice lad.”

Tregan laughed. “Thank you! I like you, too.”

“We’ll have another cooler on that,” the chief grinned. “You like it with soda?”

“I learned most of my drinking in America but I suppose I’ll have to get used to educated methods,” Tregan answered.

The soda siphon fizzed. Tregan looked out on the tropical ocean through the porthole. The boat leaned and throbbed to the swell. It was hot.

"Any chance of being picked up at the other end? You don't mind me asking?"

"Not a bit," the chief grinned. "We're under the Honduranian flag—we sail under it. Everything is fixed cash down before we sail. We don't have anything to do with it. It's just a byline of the Central American politician who owns most of the stock. The crew here is British, though, on this boat. A few Arabs and Jamaica niggers and a squareheaded bosun."

"What do you mean, cash down?"

"Well, it's costing about two thousand dollars to run you down and put you ashore. If you didn't pay it someone must like you enough to do it."

"Oh. . . ."

"All you do is walk ashore as one of the crew when we tie up. When we sail you're not on time to get aboard. That's all."

"Do you like doing this?"

"Me? I have nothing to do with it. As I said before, you're a nice lad. I watched you. I like someone to talk to. Sit up here with the door open and keep one ear cocked on the engines. That's my job. Every last moving part of this boat is mine to care for. Refrigeration system and all. I'm not supposed to know anything about Central American shenanigans. She's a sweet boat and a new boat. She's modern and fast. I've a wife and three kiddies in London. They're comfortable.

"Well, I must away down below again. Stick this cap on yer head and be a seventh assistant engineer. Go take a breather up forward."

He tossed Tregan a peaked cap—it looked jaunty—alien to such matters as courts and jurywomen with horrified faces. Tregan jammed it over one ear.

"Well, if ye don't look as seagoing as old Beatty himself! Away up on deck and get a breather and comport yourself like a ship's officer."

"I'll try not to disgrace the merchant service," grinned Tregan.

"It's easy," smiled McBaine. "Just sit up on the hatchway forrard. Come down here later and I'll take you into our mess below. They're good chaps."

He dove through the curtain. Tregan felt happy. The chief stuck his head through in a parting shot.

"An' don't be minglin' with any o' the passengers!" he called. "We're careful on this line not to let passengers get overly familiar. They're a contaminatin' influence."

37

THE darkness had brought no relief from the tropical heat. The false dawn showed gray in the east and the ship throbbed as she beat steadily southward. The water seemed hot and greasy—like dishwater, thought Tregan.

He paced along the promenade deck. The passengers had finished their last highballs and had disappeared. The deck seemed lonesome. A portable victrola lay drunkenly askew beside a deck-chair—mutely waiting for morning. An awning flapped loosely.

Carefully in the half-dark Tregan went forward—down the companionway, across the well of the deck, up to the bow where erupted a complication of winches and anchor cables. He picked his way to the extreme bow. There was a little breeze up there. The air was hot but at least it seemed to move.

He wiped his forehead. Then he saw a flutter of white beside a capstan. Not all the passengers were below, then. He turned to go.

He spoke as one does to let people in secret darkness know that they are seen.

"Getting a little cooler!"

Then he heard:

"Tregan!"

It was Alice. He felt cold, then suddenly hot.

"Alice . . . how . . . well . . . where've you been?"

It sounded foolish.

"Aboard all the time."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

"There's time, Tree," she said. "Time for everything now."

He stood beside her. She was dressed only in her underslip. She felt him looking at her.

"Disgraceful the way the tropics undermines the white man's morality, isn't it?" she laughed. It sounded good to hear Alice laugh again.

"Never mind that! How about all the rest? You paid for this?"

"This? What's this? Are you trying to quarrel with me?"

"No, no. It's cost two thousand dollars to get me down here. The chief engineer told me. You paid it—and you fixed up all the rest?"

"We all did it, Tree. It was Hegerman's grand idea. He was impractical enough to frame it. Joan made it practical in application. She got in touch with me. It was worth the chance. You were a goner. Father said so—I knew it before that. You were an awful baby on the stand. You made a terrible mess of things."

"I had to tell the truth—and I got tired of it."

"Truth be damned—why not common sense? Oh, don't think I'm angry at all, Tree. Of course you were right. You're righter than all the rest of us put together. But we had to yank you out of it. Everyone helped me. Joan—all of them. We love you."

"I'm not so right." He was miserable again. "It didn't all work out right at all."

"Well, it's worked out right now. Don't mind a woman's practical nature, Tree. You know," she said, looking far away, "Joan is one fine girl. She would cut her heart out for you, Tree."

There was nothing to say. They watched the dawn streaking up on the horizon.

"What comes after?" he said.

"Us, Tree."

"You'll get tired of it."

"I think not. We'll get along fairly well. We'll get a bungalow down there somewhere. You'll write or by God I'll know the reason why. I'll have my music."

"We could try musical comedy."

"There's nothing to stop it."

"What about Harry?"

"He's going to divorce me. Then we can be married decently. You do want to marry me, don't you, Tree? I forgot to let you ask me."

"I suppose I do. I know I love you—you know that. That's the first time I've said it. I guess I've loved you a long time. That's why I hated you so much at first. You were so far away—so damned rich. And I hated that. That's one of the troubles now."

"Can't you forget it? I won't be so damned rich."

"I'm trying to get it all straight, that's all. All my life, every time I've done a rotten thing everything's been all right. Whenever I try to be decent it gets balled up. Here we're starting out together. How the hell do we know it

will be all right? Maybe later you'll think of that trial. I ought to go back and face it. For two pins I would!"

"Oh, Tree, don't be a baby! You make me angry. You know, you have a mind like that of a child. Honestly. I'm not trying to belittle your mental quickness, but emotionally you're still at the age of fourteen. You still talk and think of love like a romantic idiot. We might as well have this out now.

"You go through the world turning everything about you into a series of dramas. Maybe too many moving pictures in your youth. Do be a man, Tree! You've got to be because I love you. You're sweet like a child—and yet you think you're such a hard-boiled newspaperman.

"Can't you get it all straight—all that went before? I know your first marriage was sad. I've got to talk of it now at the beginning. And all that life afterwards. All the post-war dirt and smartness and smuttiness and catch-as-catch-can promiscuity.

"Don't think I'm old-fashioned. I'm not a prude, but I do see beyond all that. You've been fighting it all subconsciously. You're like most young people to-day. You're decent down inside you and for the last ten years you've been trying so damned hard to cover it up.

"You think you're one of the modern degeneration. You're not. It's finished, I tell you. Everyone's sick of it. All the smutty talk and dirtiness of the post-war period is gone. We're all ready for a turn of that good old decency when you could go out to dinner and talk about slightly more elevating things than fairies and lesbians and perversion and Communism. All that's done, Tree. That's why we're going to be able to hit it off. You have enough sense to see it. That's why we're going to get married. And that's not the end. We're going to have a quota of misery and happiness.

"Only, the first scrap we have, please don't say that we've busted another dream. This isn't a dream. This is once, Tree, that you're going in on the ground floor with a solid foundation. I'm pretty, my body is soft, you'll like me physically. I'll like you. My mind is keen—not as quick as yours but a damned sight leveller. I should have been the man and you the woman as far as brains go. You've got the feminine mind.

"But we're going to quarrel—we're going to hate each other at times—you're going to wish we'd never come to this damned country. You're going to hate Spanish and niggers and greasy Central American officials. You're going to learn to be sick at the sight of hibiscus and tangled vegetation and no paving to the streets and hundreds of talking machines whining tangoes. You're going to watch me grow older and less attractive to your eye.

"All that will come—and the heat of first love will go. But don't whine about it, Tree—I'm almost saying my prayers to a man, now. This now—this is not love. Love's going to be the things that come in five or ten years and go on despite spats and bickers and quarrels. I don't want moronic love that needs a new body every two years. I want to be loved as you'd love an old house or your country or a pet horse. That sounds silly, doesn't it? But it's what I want. Your house may leak a little but you don't burn it down—your countryside may have October rains but you know that spring has got to come.

"I've seen the other kind of love—so have you. Harry—he was good but he—it doesn't matter. This, Tree, is a lifetime job you're taking. And I'm going to make you like it.

"Don't mind me if for once I've presumed to know more than you. But I do. You're such a blind baby. Trying to make life loop the loop. I'm never going to say all these things again. Because once you see it clearly you'll never want to go back to the old way of thinking.

"All your life you've gone through a sort of dream novel—expecting certain causes to bring certain results. When you've been bad, you've wondered why you didn't get rewarded with evil. When you've been good, you've expected the same in return. It's only in drama that it works out like that. Drama is art. It's balanced. Life isn't. It's haphazard—it has no reason and no continuity.

"You're eternally expecting the happy ending of a chapter, so that you can go on gloriously to the next act. There is no chapter and there is no act. The middle of one act is the end of another and the beginning of a third all at the same time. It isn't sorted out neatly for the onlooker to see. You're still like a child with a fairy tale—looking for the happy ending. There is none.

"This may look like a happy ending to one episode for you. It is the beginning of another—and that may not be so happy. But it's going to be decent."

He was silent.

"Don't you see, Tree?" she asked. "Don't make me cry."

"What can I say, Alice? I know you're right. But please don't ever expect me to be too sane at any time."

She smiled. "We'll get there, Tree."

They looked out over the water. The sun crept, a bloody silver, up on the horizon. Before the prow schools of startled flying fishes scuttled away. The sun gleamed on their iridescent wings. Away to the right the towering mountains loomed like great mauve clouds.

"They look like clouds," Tregan said.

"Aren't they?"

"No, mountains. We must be near port."

"We'll land about seven. I'll have everything ready at the hotel and then come back to the dock to get you."

"You'd better go below," he said. "Some of the passengers might be up and see you like that."

"My God, Tree, I knew you were really an old-fashioned Puritan at heart. You don't mind my being a woman, do you?"

He laughed. "You look pretty in those things," he said.

Her eyes were bright. "You haven't kissed me yet, Tree—ever."

"Not yet, Alice," he said. "Let me get used to you. It's enough knowing you're near."

"We've got all the rest of our lives, Tree."

She went below. The sun lifted from the water and the ship flashed out—a thing of searing white paint. He leaned over the bow and tried to remember all that Alice had said. He could remember it almost word for word—the old reporter's trick. Idly he wondered when that faculty would atrophy. Not much chance of using it down here. He'd have to stay here always—if he ever left Honduras he could be taken back to face the charge again.

And Alice was going to share all that with him. She was right about all that love stuff, too. Why shouldn't you learn to love a woman as you loved an opera or a symphony or a chair that you liked or a certain vista of a landscape? All this sex stuff—it didn't matter half as much as everyone let on.

His mind slid over the words she had said while his eyes watched the ship drawing near to land. He could see the green of the mountains now. The verdant strip along the shore slowly changed to a fertile place of coco palms and banana plantations. Then he saw the wooden houses appearing—a town. The first smell of the hot tropical jungle smote his nose. He thought he'd never forget it. It was strange and pungent.

He could see people walking in the early morning along a wharf. The women were in gay, barbaric colors—carrying bundles on their heads. There were men sitting on the dock looking out at the white liner beating into the bay.

Birds rose lazily from the water. He realized they were pelicans. It seemed strange to think that there were pelicans outside the zoos. It seemed

strange to think that he, Llewellyn Tregan, was going to live in a land where there were pelicans—and where people didn't want to catch them and put them in cages.

He was going to make everything different this time. Work hard—that would be it. And children—they'd have to send them home to the old country for education. At that, his life would be no worse than that of Britishers who spent their lives in India.

Still, what was the use of planning? Alice said he played around with ideas on himself too much. He remembered the words. This is the middle of one act, the end of another, and the beginning of still another. There was no happy ending to life. You had to take any one moment and be ready to call that quits. No grand finale. Just incidents without sequence. At this very moment you might as well ring down a curtain and call it an act.

He looked out over the water. A strange land. A new one. The end of one act and the beginning of another. Perhaps it was so.

The siren of the ship screeched. The sound ricochetted across the waters and rebounded from the distant mountains. The jungle birds rose in discordant terror, a pelican flapped lazily in the water. A tiny boat put out from the wharf—bringing the pilot.

38

WOMEN were wondering how large leg of mutton sleeves could be (and still remain not too ultra) and with a great deal of newspaper publicity Henry Ford declined to say anything about his refusal to join President Roosevelt's NRA code.

With headlong haste Americans moved away from Majorca where, my dear, you get practically nothing for the American dollar these days and it costs you as much to live as at home; people asked each other if it wasn't horrible to think about those hundred men who had been burned to death when trapped in an American cañon by the brush fire they had been trying to beat out.

A man named Auguste Piccard, with notable courage, went up in the air in a balloon and rose into the stratosphere; in the interests of civilization men with the latest weapons of warfare moved on the Chaco frontiers in South America, suppressing one another and leaving many Bolivian and Paraguayan widows to mourn the suppressed.

Lifeless bodies lay in the Atlas Mountains as French soldiers passed on their way; burning against injustice Ramon Grau San Martin and Sergeant Fulgencio Batista led a revolt against President de Cespedes in Cuba; the world seemed to be going to pot in Germany where Adolf Hitler's men put into concrete expression a dislike and envy of the Jews; strikers hoped against hope in Spain and the United States, while a goodly number of adult persons spent many hours becoming expert at pushing balls around a little table in a game called bagatelle.

In the State of Maryland Governor Ritchie, displaying courage, arrested mob-leaders who had tortured and killed a Negro suspected of rape, while in the State of California Governor Rolph extolled his heroes who had lynched two white prisoners; many experts delivered themselves of the opinion that business conditions would be much better now that America was off the gold standard, while the world whistled something about gitting along little doggies and who was afraid of the big bad wolf, and decided that this man, Maurice Chevalier, was "a card".

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 *Invitation to Life* by Eric Knight]