

JUPITER EIGHT

FRANCIS POLLOCK



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By the same author

BITTER HONEY

JUPITER EIGHT

by
FRANCIS
POLLOCK

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All the characters and events in this book are entirely fictitious. With the exception of a brief sketch of an art critic in the first chapter, great care has been taken to avoid anything that could suggest a resemblance to any real person. If any such resemblance should seem to exist, it is accidental and contrary to intention.

F. P.

Jupiter Eight

CHAPTER I

Expertly rolling cigarettes, and smoking them almost as fast as he rolled them, Edgar Lloyd continued to talk rapidly. At intervals he struck off the ashes upon Derrock's Chinese rug, unconscious of his surroundings, his face veiled in a fog of enthusiasm and thought. So talking, he was in a state of almost mystical rapture, and he was capable of continuing in it for hours, days, months, for eternities, and he was probably saying valuable things; but Ford Derrock was not listening to him.

For Derrock felt something new and strange, and perhaps mystical stirring within himself. He felt that there was a change coming to him. He nursed his bruised knee; he brushed the dust from his trousers. Indeed a change had very nearly come to him. It had been the narrowest shave he had ever had in his life, and he nursed his knee where the fender of the long grey car had grazed it.

He leaned his elbow on his mahogany writing-table, a copy of a piece in the National Museum. He glanced at the sheets of stationery on it, handsome, embossed in gold, 'Atelier Duroc. Interior Decoration'. The same legend was on his door; he could see it reversed through the frosted glass. In the outer office sat Florence the stenographer, purely an interior decoration herself, since she seldom had anything to do, but an indispensable accessory now that his business was becoming important, just as indispensable as the rosewood piano with the works of Bach on it, which he couldn't play.

He had spent much time and thought in arranging this atelier. Everything in it was of supreme elegance, of the utmost good taste. Nobody could call it anything but arty; yet for the first time his heart rose violently against it. Or perhaps his stomach turned.

Edgar Lloyd did not see anything. Looking intensely well-dressed, smooth as if he had just been waxed and varnished, he shook another charge of fine-cut into a paper and rolled it, licking it feverishly.

'O Mrs. Porter and her daughter!
They wash their feet in soda-water . . .'

‘What?’ Derrock ejaculated.

‘You see, you get the effect, Rock, but you haven’t caught the principle of the thing. Now listen . . .

But still from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors that will bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O Mrs. Porter and her daughter . . .

‘What do you make of that, Rock?’

‘Bunk,’ said Derrock, who had not listened.

‘Oh no, Rock, you can’t say “bunk”. For he’s really a very great poet, a great psychologist, the god of the younger intellectuals, of the new ironists. At least, he was until he turned religious. You can’t say “bunk” to a god, Rock, even if it’s only a sort of religious, intellectualist god. No, there’s a great punch in it, only you don’t get the shock where the punch lands. He says one thing and means quite another. It’s a system of calculated mental reflex action . . . the anatomical school of poetry . . . a sort of spiritual jujitsu. Don’t you really make anything of it, Rock?’

‘No,’ said Derrock, not listening. He could not take his mind from the shock of that long grey car. He was crossing a quiet spot on Bay Street when the car came down on him like a bullet, like a shell, like a bolt of death. It must have been going over sixty. He had barely time to jump. The fender grazed his knee and threw him down. The hot blast of the exhaust struck his face. The licence number flashed over his eyes—xz33—so much of it stuck indelibly in his memory. Before he could get on his feet the car was almost out of sight down the street, with its driver either drunk or speed-crazed.

And when he got back to his office he found Edgar Lloyd waiting there, wanting to talk. Derrock looked about his large and expensive atelier with inexplicable misgiving. He still felt a sense of impending collision. Yet there was nothing here that was not reassuring. He had knocked two rooms into one to get the proportions exactly right, and had papered them with an imitation of stamped leather, but an imitation that did not for a moment pretend to be real. The floor was dark and polished, but not shiny, and it was relieved by four small, exquisite Asiatic rugs, loaned for sale. He would get a large commission if he sold them.

On each of the four walls hung two small, exquisitely-framed pictures, loaned by the artists, and if he sold them he would get a commission. The rosewood cabinet was a copy of a piece in the Louvre, and it contained his

samples of stuffs, brocades, wall-papers, metal work. The fireplace had a priceless antique brass fender, for sale on commission. Everything was in the utmost perfection of taste, and a client must feel that interior decoration could be nowhere better planned in Toronto, or even in the whole of America. Derrock had been very proud of it: but now his stomach rose against it, and deep in his entrails he felt a presentiment of change.

‘. . . but the universe is a motor machine, Rock, and there isn’t any emotion in it. Man has put it in, because man is naturally nothing but emotion, and that is why he is human. But we have to cut out all the emotions if we are to get to reality, and that’s what these new intellectual ironists are doing. We must cut out emotion and sentiment, Rock. We must destroy all ideals of beauty, for the only beauty that actually exists is the rhythm of the motor machine, and it’s hard to catch the tune of it. Especially we must cut out the idea of love, for there isn’t any such thing. There never was, Rock. It’s a superstition that women have contrived to foster for their own private benefit. There’s nothing but the natural physical lusts and the natural human sympathies, and we’ve been persuaded to stir these together into a cocktail instead of keeping them properly separate. That’s what’s at the bottom of the whole Romantic movement, and I lay it to the two great curses of the modern world, religion and feminism. The Greeks didn’t have the idea at all and Alcibiades is reported to have said . . .’

You had to be quick if you were going to follow Edgar Lloyd, for his mind passed from one subject to another by laws of association peculiarly its own. He would put a girdle around the whole circumference of a subject in forty seconds, and come back to where he started, frequently to find himself now facing the other way. But this did not disconcert him, for he had a perfectly catholic mind, and was capable of holding several diametrically opposite opinions at the same time. It was only in matters of religion that he always faced uncompromisingly the same way; for he was so fundamentally anti-clerical that he could not endure the least taste of piety in anything that he read. A great area of literature was thus barred to him, and of science too; for he detected dangerously mystical tendencies in much of modern physics and mathematics. He was a financial reporter on the *Express*, a shrewd and confirmed stock-player, and he existed entirely in his two passions—gambling and the theory of literary art.

Florence, the stenographer, opened the door and came in with the late afternoon mail. Derrock glanced at the envelopes. Nothing seemed of importance. Most of the envelopes bore business addresses, and he knew what they contained without opening them—solicitations to sell their

wallpaper or furniture-polish or door-handles. There was a letter addressed in Erma Frieslander's peculiarly childish scrawl, but he didn't open it just then. He had promised to take Erma out to dinner, but he had forgotten it. There was also a letter from Chicago, a large envelope, with DANGER stamped across the top in startling blood-red letters.

Derrock was startled for a moment, and then he understood. DANGER—the great story weekly magazine. Another advertisement, or solicitation.

‘But all that is the bunk!’ Lloyd said, with burning conviction.

‘I'm sure it is, Lloyd. But what? How about a spot of tea? Did you have any lunch?’

Lloyd didn't hear him. He continued to talk rapidly, in the smooth Cambridge voice that his years in Canada had only slightly corrupted, and he gazed at Derrock without really seeing him, looking at him through a dense fog of thought. He did not mind not being listened to. He was used to it, and he talked for the satisfaction of his own needs, and not for any audience. From time to time he struck off ashes upon Derrock's valuable rug.

‘Please don't knock ashes on the rug,’ Derrock entreated him, presenting an ash-tray. The rug did not belong to Derrock, and if it were damaged he would have to pay for it.

Lloyd looked vaguely at the ash-tray, deposited his ashes in it, and then dropped the burning butt on the rug.

‘Of course, I'm all for the new movement, Rock. I'm all for the revolution, if only on the general principle that any storm is good in a port. But I haven't really much hope for it. It's bound to be choked out by women, as women have always smothered . . .’

‘How about a drink, Lloyd?’

By sheer momentum Lloyd continued for several more phrases, but the suggestion had penetrated his mind. He paused, looked disconcerted, ceased from talking. Like a man walking in his sleep, he got up and moved slowly towards the farther end of the room. He stopped before a walnut cupboard, where Derrock kept some of his less decorative and more personal articles.

Apparently in deep abstraction, he opened the cupboard and took out a plate of rather dried sandwiches and another plate with the remains of a chocolate cake on it, relics of the last time Derrock had served afternoon tea

to clients. Again he groped among the shelves and he brought out a bottle of whisky, more than half full.

His eye brightened, and a much more human expression spread over his face as he placed these provisions on the writing-table. He fetched a carafe of water and poured a drink for Derrock and one for himself. He swallowed his own drink, and then Derrock's, and immediately poured himself another. Cramming a sandwich into his mouth, he began to talk rapidly about Mallarmé and James Joyce, whom he seemed to connect.

It was perhaps the first time he had eaten that day, for he took no thought of food, and ate only when something happened to come to his eye. He slept at irregular moments, or not at all. He was capable of playing bridge or poker all night, almost always winning, for he was a marvellous card-player, then reading poetry until eight o'clock, and then going down to the *Express* office with his invariable appearance of having been freshly waxed and varnished. He spent the day among the brokerage and financial offices. He was a good reporter. The financial men liked him; and sometimes he was able to pass them a useful bit of advance news, and they sometimes gave him in return a tip on the market. Lloyd was always playing an odd-lot in New York, or a few thousand bushels of grain in Chicago. When he won he pyramided his winnings, and continued to pyramid till the tide turned and he lost it all. He did not care, he had no use for small sums, and he knew that some day the tide would not turn till he had made the pile he wanted.

Lloyd was then about twenty-seven, dark, slight and handsome, with a little tooth-brush moustache and he was always dressed with the most intense correctness, though he never seemed to take any thought about his clothes. He had been in Canada more than five years. Only God and himself knew why he had ever come here, straight from Cambridge to Toronto, with what illusions of fortune or freedom, nor what disillusion he had since suffered. Probably no one else would ever know, for he never spoke of these things, expressing only in a general way his detestation of England, Canada, the United States, journalism, women, aristocracy, democracy, socialism, capitalism, the simple life, organized religion and popular-priced art.

He was the perfect journalist, for he could write on any subject, at any length, with the most entire absence of conviction, and even of information. But there was not much scope for clever writing on the financial pages of the *Express*. Apart from his journalism, he wrote small, short poems, which he said were translations from modern French or Italian poets whom nobody else had ever heard of. He never tried to publish these. He carried them about in his pockets and read them to people, to reporters, to brokers, to

anybody, indifferent to his audience, wholly absorbed in gambling and the theory of literary art.

During those long months of the years while Derrock had sat waiting for business that seemed never going to come Lloyd's visits had often been his greatest pleasure. Often they had sat up all night with bottled beer and volumes of the newest verse. Often again Lloyd had been a perfect pest. He came to see you and talked, not out of any human sympathy but solely for his own satisfaction. It was a toss-up whether he would talk about literature or about the stock market, but he never stopped, and you couldn't get rid of him.

But those days of Derrock's anxiety and unsuccess were closing. He was actually making money now. The Atelier Duroc was beginning to be important. The contract for the Pelletier mansion had given him his start, a great stroke of luck. He had another good commission or two almost in hand, notably the big house of Solly Leviticus. He was almost certain of it, and it would certainly bring more business among Solly's friends. Solly was to see him about it in a day or two. Ended, at last, those desolate months while he sat waiting in his arty atelier, amusing himself by reading novels, dabbling in literary composition himself, listening to Edgar Lloyd.

'But all that is quite the bunk, Rock. You know Jerry Mertens, the bee-keeper, don't you? He lives back in the country somewhere. I've been there, but I don't know where it is. He lives the simple life and meditates, on a dollar a week. Now I've no use for the simple life, and I can't see why it's more meritorious to live on a dollar a week than on a dollar a minute.'

'Maybe Jerry hasn't a dollar a minute,' Derrock suggested, knowing the Old Lowlands bee-keeper very well.

'I don't suppose he has,' Lloyd agreed contemptuously. 'And he has no idea how to make it. There's not much of the speculator about Jerry. However, imbecile as we'll agree he is, he does sometimes hit on an idea, and he once said to me that literature must be either a food or an intoxicant. It must either nourish you or make your head swim. Now I don't care about being intoxicated,' Lloyd continued, swallowing great lumps of cake, and drinking half a tumbler of whisky in his excitement, 'but I do demand to be nourished. But do I get it—the proteins, the roughage of Rabelais, the vitamins of Shelley? No, I get mostly spoon-food and soda-fountain stuff ...'

He broke off and glanced suspiciously about the room. He refilled his tumbler.

‘The trouble is, there’s too much bloody good taste in the world,’ he said gloomily.

These words struck Derrock with the force of a revelation. He too glanced quickly about his arty atelier, and then half closed his eyes. He knew now what was the matter with his studio, with his business, with himself, with everything. There was far too much bloody good taste.

Unconscious of having pronounced the illuminating phrase, Lloyd was already far away on another tack. He was quoting verse again, for he had a prodigious memory, and could have dictated a complete English anthology without even stopping to think.

‘“Now all strange hours and all strange loves are over,
Dreams and desires and sombre songs and sweet . . .”

sweet enough stuff, Rock, and maybe a little intoxicating too, but all that is certainly bunk.’

But Derrock did not hear him. He had a capsizing sense of the inversion of all standards, of the transvaluation of all values. Quite unconsciously he finished his drink and poured himself another. Quite mechanically he looked again at the pile of letters that had just come in. He looked at the envelope stamped in red letters DANGER, and opened it.

‘My dear Mr. Derrock . . .’

[It wasn’t an advertisement. It was a letter]

‘Our readers sent me a bad report on your story *Dr. James B. Faust and Satan*, but I read the manuscript myself, for I always have felt that the opera should be novelized. I can use it in *Danger* if you will permit some radical changes. It is too long by about 20,000 words, and is full of poetical and philosophical passages that our readers would not understand, and a lot of sex filth which is against the policy of *Danger*. But you have a great story and I think you have the punch.

‘The title is rotten, and I would change it to *The Devil Deals*. I would expand the Margaret episode, and have her marry him at the last, so that her pure influence enables him to defeat the devil. The adventures, robberies, duels, etc. are fine and just what we want.

‘We have a staff of expert re-writers who can make all these changes. If you agree, wire me at once, and I will immediately

mail you a cheque for \$2000. This is far below our usual rates, but the story will require much rehandling. *Danger* pays the highest rates in the world for pure story quality.

‘You should be writing us three novels a year at \$5000 apiece. Cut out the arty stuff; nix on the highbrow stuff; can the sex stuff.

‘Yours for good Literature,
‘LARRY DONOVAN,
‘Editor *Danger*’.

Derrock read this letter twice over, with incredulity, with amazement, with a sense, as Lloyd said, of being both nourished and intoxicated at the same time. And with bewilderment, for how on earth had his novel, *Dr. James B. Faust and Satan* got into the office of *Danger*?

He did not think that he had ever bought a copy of that weekly in his life. But he was familiar with *Danger*, like everybody else. The news-stands were always piled with it; it was the biggest seller in America. It was the biggest advertiser. Its red posters were on all the hoardings, and were so frequently mistaken for traffic signals, that the police had to order them to be taken down. But Derrock had never thought of writing for *Danger*. Finally he remembered.

He had written the story more than a year ago, during those dead days while he waited for business. Like Larry Donovan, he had always felt that there should be a modern Faust novel. He thought that the Faust legend is the most universal story in the world, since every man sells his soul to the devil, in whole or in part, piecemeal or in bulk.

Derrock made his story strictly up to date. His Faust was an elderly, impoverished, disappointed professor of Latin in a small provincial college. Mephistopheles came to him in the form of an Austrian scientist, who restored him to youth and vigour by a gland-grafting operation, and made him wealthy by infallible information on the stock market. Rich and young and unscrupulous, Dr. James B. Faust was then pledged to a career of pure evil.

Here Derrock found himself stumped. He could not think of anything evil enough for his Faust to do. What was pure evil? It is very difficult for a rich man to sin, unless by committing excesses against his own body; and Derrock’s Faust was so supernaturally strong that no excesses could affect him. Or by cold cruelty—but Jim Faust was far too healthy to be a sadist;

and Derrock could not describe cruelties and nobody would want to read about them.

It was evident that both Marlowe and Goethe had found the same difficulty. Derrock evaded it by plunging his hero in a series of melodramatic adventures, gamblings, seductions, duels, dangers in all quarters of the world—not very much absolute evil in any of them, though. He did indeed seduce Margaret, but he gave her the time of her life. In the end, when the devil should have claimed his prey, Faust died in an odour of considerable sanctity. Mephisto had over-reached himself. He had done his Faust altogether too well. For it is difficult to damn a multi-millionaire.

Derrock had taken great pleasure in writing this his first attempt at fiction. He had written it with great pains, much of it several times over, and he thought fondly of it. But every New York publisher had refused it, and he had not even dared to show the manuscript to Edgar Lloyd.

Finally, with no hope and little interest left, he had sent the battered sheets to his friend Burlington Burton, a professional magazine writer in New York, asking him to suggest what might possibly be done with it. And Burlington had placed it, with the unerring eye of the professional, right in the bull's-eye at the very first shot. Derrock had never thought of it as a magazine serial, but if Larry Donovan would pay \$2000 for it, Larry could do what he liked with it. He could tear it all up and write it again if it pleased him to do so.

Derrock took up his desk telephone, and called the Canadian National Telegraphs.

DAY MESSAGE COLLECT TO LARRY DONOVAN
EDITOR DANGER CHICAGO TERMS ACCEPTED SEND
CHEQUE YOURS FOR GOOD LITERATURE FORD
DERROCK

Edgar Lloyd was still talking, seemed to be again quoting verse, but Derrock did not hear him. He had the joy of a new and indubitable revelation. He had imagined that he was putting a lot of valuable stuff into his Faust, much brilliant writing, and philosophy and poetry and symbolism. But he realized now that all that was bunk. Nothing was any good but pure story quality; but he appeared to have it, and also, it seemed, he had the punch.

Larry Donovan wanted three novels a year, at \$5000 apiece. Certainly Derrock would furnish them. He would ask nothing better. To travel down

dark ways of mystery and adventure, personally conducting men of pure nerve and muscle, real heroes like Homer's, incapable of thought or fatigue or failure—that was the life! No women, nothing but heroines, dolls of marvellous beauty who squeaked 'yes' or 'no' according to the way you squeezed them. But that was approaching real psychology. Nix on the highbrow stuff.

Edgar Lloyd was still talking without lessening his enthusiasm. He was talking about Sapho and about Edna St. Vincent Millay, damning them both. The bottle was getting low, and Derrock took it from him and poured himself another stiff dose. His brain began to flicker with plots like a cinema screen. He could think of any number of them. He could make up, not three, but a dozen novels a year, without even stopping to think.

Gorgeous ideas for real thrillers flared into his mind. He had been somewhat handicapped by his literary tastes, for he liked Stendhal and Rider Haggard almost equally. He thought that *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *King Solomon's Mines* were the two best novels in the world. Now he thought of a Chicago novel, of great gamblers, great gangsters, racing airmen, international crooks, beautiful Hollywood heroines, an immense buried treasure, not buried on a desert island, but concealed in a safe-deposit vault. There were the elements of romance, and they were real, and in the newspapers every day. These things actually existed, and were capable of a handling as acute as Balzac. He thought of a story of unparalleled fierceness of action, with a psychology as acute as Beyle's. For he couldn't see any reason, after all, why a grand novel shouldn't be as melodramatic as a grand opera.

It would be an intoxicant; it would make their heads swim. It would equally charm a highbrow reviewer and an office-boy. Derrock looked at Lloyd with astonishment. Lloyd was a journalist, a gambler, a man of action. Why didn't he cut out the arty stuff? The world was full of better things—action, gambling, journalism. He took the bottle away from Lloyd again and poured out all the rest of its contents. He would have liked just then to put a thousand dollars on the turn of a card, on the turn of a stock. He thought of pleasure cities, of adventure cities. He thought of Erma Frieslander, with the ugly face and the beautiful body.

'... but the universe is a motor machine, Rock, and it isn't easy to catch the tune of it, the everlasting recurrence, the eternal return. Nietzsche had the right idea, but he hadn't the scientific training to put it really across, and so he skidded off into mere poetry. Probably his Antichrist is the Redeemer

we've been looking for, only we've probably crucified him without knowing it. What I mean to say is . . .'

Derrock hadn't the least idea of what Lloyd was meaning to say, but he felt that he couldn't stand any more of it. But Lloyd was going at full speed now, and couldn't be stopped. Short of absolute wreck, there was no way to stop him. Derrock determined to wreck him.

'How was the market to-day, Lloyd? What did American Can do?' he interrupted, loudly and violently.

Lloyd stopped short, and gazed at him with changing eyes. He gulped and blinked several times with the shock of derailment. The cigarette fell from his lips. Automatically he began to roll another, while his mind worked violently, striving to right itself on the new line. His face assumed a totally different expression.

'The market was on the bum to-day,' he said rapidly, in a totally different voice. 'American Can didn't do anything. It'll go lower before it's any higher. Chicago grains were up a little, but the New York market was pretty near paralysed. Nothing but scalping out eighths. Motors moved up a little and so did Michigan Underwear. I've been watching that stock, Rock, and there's no reason for it to be as high as it is. It's been bid up by a western bull clique, and I look for a tumble in it. Wallie Weatherford thinks so too, and you can generally back Wallie's judgment. But of course the whole list was marking time to-day waiting for the court decision on the Black Belt merger. The decision won't be given out till noon to-morrow, and if they're allowed to take over the Mainwater Canal system, there'll be some hot trading in Infernal Coke. But I don't think they will. I think the decision will be against them, and Wallie Weatherford thinks so too. Still, you never can tell. It's a good gambling proposition, either way. Nobody knows.'

'Does nobody really know?'

'Well, nobody is supposed to know, and I suppose nobody does know for certain, outside the Commission. But you can't keep some inkling of such a thing from getting out in advance. Too many keen eyes watching for any hint. It leaks out by a process of telepathy. I expect there are several men in New York who could make a shrewd guess which way it's going to go, but if anybody in Toronto has the tip it'll be Wallie Weatherford.'

Derrock had only a slight acquaintance with Wallace Weatherford, who was now a great personality, an example to youth, an inspiration to everybody. Only a few years ago he had been an obscure mining and real

estate broker, but by a series of amazingly lucky or wonderfully shrewd plays he had become a prince, and one of the leading figures in Canadian speculation. He was going to build a huge house on the Hill, and Derrock had hoped, though almost hopelessly, to get some part of the contract for its interior decoration.

‘You mean that the Canal and Black Belt stocks will go up if the merger is allowed?’

‘Oh yes, undoubtedly they’ll move up. But the hot point of the situation is Infernal Coke.’

Lloyd went on to explain at length, detailing the technical positions of Coke, Mainwater and Black Belt. All of them were bankrupt, he said; none were dividend-paying; they had various controlling interests in one another. But if the merger were allowed, then the Coke shares, though still quite worthless, would become a strong bull proposition. Derrock tried to understand, his brain clouding, but he realized that this wasn’t the bunk.

‘You think that Infernal Coke will go up to-morrow, then?’

‘No, I don’t think anything about it. I wouldn’t play it. It’s a pure gamble at present. But the general opinion seems to be that the decision will go against them. Coke has been weak for several days, and if it breaks it’ll crash the whole list. Now I told you about Michigan Underwear. That stock is in a very acute position, and so are nearly all the low-priced industrials. In fact, the whole market is over-bought, and I look for a crash any time. I’m naturally a bear. Every man is by nature either a bull or a bear, just as he’s naturally either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. Call money was up to-day, and that shows the banks are getting under cover. I feel certain that the whole list will average ten points lower within a month, and if I could margin about 10,000 Michigan Underwear on the short side . . .’

Lloyd’s face was becoming fixed again, clouded with a dense fog of thought and calculation. This was worse than the theory of literature. Lloyd couldn’t be stopped now, and Derrock didn’t want to switch him back to poetry; but he had developed a technique for such occasions. He got up and took his hat.

‘I promised to look in at Wellington London’s studio this afternoon, and I’m afraid it’s time to go,’ he said.

Probably not hearing him, Lloyd nevertheless imitated Derrock’s movement, and mechanically also rose and took his hat. He did not notice

that he was being steered out the door and down the stairs. He continued to explain the impending smash in securities.

‘All the industrials are bound to go lower, Rock, even the steels. Motors too, of course, for they always go with the steels . . .’

Holding Derrock’s arm, he accompanied him out to the corner and stood by him while he waited for a tramcar. He followed him aboard, talking rapidly of Nickel Plate.

‘Of course if the Chicago crowd have really got a controlling interest you can’t tell what may happen. But I think that’s only a street rumour, a tipster’s story. The long and short is that the whole market is top-heavy, and it’s only a question of time . . .’

Derrock got off, and Lloyd still followed him. Derrock resigned himself. He hadn’t really meant to go to Wellington London’s studio, but he would have to go now; and once inside Lloyd would have to stop talking.

They went up in the elevator. London’s studio was a vast place on the top floor of the highest business building in Toronto. He said he liked the air and light. He also liked the elevation, which was somehow symbolic. This was his headquarters. He lived here with his sister, but he had branch establishments in Montreal and Winnipeg.

Derrock tapped gently with the little brass knocker. The door opened gently, and the pleasant elderly face of Miss London appeared, peering out with an infinite precaution of silence. She gazed at them near-sightedly, and Derrock doubted whether she recognized either of them; but she gave them the pleased professional smile that she gave to every well-dressed person who came to her brother’s place of business.

‘Come in. So glad you came!’ she said under her breath. ‘Wellington’s still working, but the light is beginning to fail, and he’ll be through in a few minutes.’

They tip-toed in like people who have come late to church, but Derrock caught the painter’s quick irritated glance at the disturbance. Dead silence was in the vast studio, though there were more than a dozen people there, seated about on chairs as if at a spectacle. Dead silence was the condition of being admitted to see the great Anglo-Canadian painter at work. London liked to paint before an admiring audience. It stimulated him, and he said laughingly that if he could paint on the stage of a filled theatre he would produce a masterpiece. But without that he produced masterpieces all the time.

Enormously tall, bony and bald-headed, London stood at the easel at the far end of the room, under the dead glare of the top-light. He almost faced his audience, who could see only the back of the canvas. His right sleeve was rolled over his bony forearm. His left arm hung at his side. His left hand was crippled with an old injury, so that he could not carry a palette, and he used a porcelain-topped painting-table for his colours. He stepped quickly to and fro, forward and back, dabbing at the canvas. His little black eyes darted from the canvas to the figure on the model stand opposite him. Here sat a gorgeous figure against a purplish-dark curtain, in the full dress uniform of an officer of the North Ontario Highlanders, scarlet tunic, black and green kilt, hairy sporran, straps and belts, brass sword-hilt and sallow bare knees. Above the gold-embroidered collar rose a round red face with small cunning eyes. This was Major McMack, an honorary officer of the Great War, and one of the leading crockery manufacturers of Toronto.

He posed with an air of bored, modest pride, and in breathless silence the audience watched him, and watched the great painter. It was going to be one of London's greatest successes. He was going to get five thousand for it—no, ten thousand—but that was nothing! Though now close to sixty, Wellington London seemed to be at the height of his powers. He was the greatest painter in Toronto, in Ontario, in the whole of Canada. He was said to be the greatest Toronto painter in the world.

He had been christened John Wesley Loudon in Manchester where he was born. Emigrating to Canada, his parents had brought him with them at the age of six. In Toronto he developed his aptitude for painting, and had exhibited at all the provincial galleries before he was twenty. Realizing that he had a future, he dropped the 'John' from his name, and changed the 'Wesley', with its nonconformist suggestion, to 'Wellesley'. Much later, this became 'Wellington', by natural historical transition; and by the simple inversion of a single letter 'Loudon' became the much more impressive 'London'.

At the age of twenty-five he went back to England to play the role of a colonial genius. But he made no headway in London. The international pace was too fast for him; he was hopelessly outclassed. He made a plucky fight, but in eight years he had to give up. He had not the money to hold out longer, and at that crisis in his affairs, he had his hand crushed in a motor-bus accident.

But this did not quell his spirit. He obtained £100 from the bus company in compensation, and luckily it was his left hand. It did not interfere with his painting, except that he had to use a painting-table instead of a palette. He

returned to Toronto, spent most of his indemnity in giving an exhibition, and, with the prestige of his eight years in London, he was an almost immediate success. He perceived that he should have come home sooner.

He presently developed a mission. It was to be an Imperial painter, a Kipling of the canvas, an artistic interpreter between Canada and the Mother Land. All the Anglophile circles encouraged him, took him up, all the English, all the would-be English, the official, the rich. He painted a number of lieutenant-governors and men in uniforms. He could paint cloth and gold lace excellently, but he painted everything, men, women and horses, still-life and landscapes, and every year he was able to raise his prices. When the Great War broke out he was one of the first to offer himself for enlistment, indifferent to his crippled hand. He was not accepted, but he was highly praised for his patriotism. Even the post-war slump did not check his progress. He opened studios in Winnipeg and Montreal, kept up permanent exhibitions there, and spent some months in each city, working hard to fill his numerous orders. He did not belong to the Royal Canadian Academy, nor to any of the provincial Associations, though they had invited him, and though he was always a welcome guest exhibitor; but he said that he did not wish to identify himself with any local group, but with the Empire as a whole. There was no nonsense about modernism in London's work, no Continental impressionism. 'The style of old Sir Joshua is good enough for me,' he was accustomed to say; and he painted every button, every finger and hair with true British pluck and thoroughness. Several times he had gone back to London to hold an exhibition there, but lately these visits had grown infrequent; and he had even been heard to say that painting in England had gone crazy, and that the future of art must be looked for in the Dominions.

In silence and in almost religious reverence his audience watched him paint. Most of the people in the studio were women, and Derrock knew many of them. Some had been clients of his own. They were women with artistic leanings, expensive women from up-town, from the wealthy, the official, the imperialist, the Daughters of the Empire Circles where London chiefly traded. Among the few men he saw Carlton Maitland, the book reviewer of the *Week*, dark and accursed-looking as usual, and he noticed Mr. Charlemagne Roncesvalles, the eminent art critic of the same paper, portly and puissant, leaning on his cane and smiling secretly and indulgently as he watched the painter. And sitting rather by herself Derrock saw a striking figure in black and old-gold, with a hat like a helmet of bronze and iron, bronze shoes, bronzy stockings, and also a great deal of real gold and black fur. She sat quite impassive, but women's faces were continually

turned toward her in secret glances of hostility and cold disapproval and burning curiosity.

‘I’ll bet there’s the secret of the Black Belt decision,’ Lloyd whispered. ‘Lola Matanzas,’ he added.

Derrock looked with great interest at the Spanish-Cuban actress, whom he had previously seen only on the stage. She was playing minor roles in a local stock company, but she had been in Toronto all winter, and was already a celebrity, or a notoriety. On a salary of perhaps thirty dollars a week, she lived at the Imperial Royal Hotel and dressed like a millionaire’s daughter or a gambler’s mistress. Wallie Weatherford looked after her, and neither of them made any secret of it.

‘I’ll bet Wallie has told her something about the decision, if he’s heard anything,’ Lloyd said. ‘I’ll bet she has a good notion how it’s going to go.’

‘But what’s she doing in this gallery—in the arty crowd?’

Lloyd, who knew everything, explained that Wellington London had been painting her portrait. It was Lola’s latest freak to have herself exhibited at the spring show of the National Academy. It might cost a few thousands, but she didn’t care what it would cost; and neither did Wallie, who had been in the rise in Motors from the start, and must have cleaned up a quarter of a million from that alone.

Miss London had been sitting beside her, to keep her in countenance—as if she needed it! But Lloyd, who knew everybody, knew Miss Matanzas, and he went over and whispered to her, and then beckoned to Derrock. He mentioned Derrock’s name under his breath, and Lola turned her full, blank stare upon him, the famous stare that she cultivated, without any more expression than an empty dinner-plate. She had a face that always looked made up even when it was not, a large face, heavy and square, with a creamy, powdery, darkly-perfect skin almost destitute of any colour. Her mouth was too full, too wide, too crimson, her eyelashes too heavy, her eyes too large, like great brown-black pools with nothing in them, not even any bottom. Her rather large head looked larger with the heavy coils of her famous hair, thick and black and coarse, which no barber had ever scissored, wound in masses under her bronze helmet. She sat quite still, almost stupidly inert, but all around her was a compelling and exciting and irritating aura or aroma.

‘I saw you last night in your new role, Lola,’ Lloyd said. ‘You were absolutely perfect. You were so perfect that you killed the scene. Nobody

could look at anything but you.’

Lloyd, who hated women, always addressed them in that tone of derisive compliment, which women hated. Lola looked at him blankly without saying anything, and then turned her full, powerfully-vacant stare upon Derrock again.

‘I’ve heard of you. You’re a house decorator, ain’t you?’ she said. She had a rather husky, middle-western voice, for her real name was Lulu Riggs, and she came from Matanzas, Iowa.

‘Not at all. I’m a novelist.’

‘Novelist nothing! I’ve heard of you, lots of times. Solly Leviticus told me he was going to get you to do over his house. Say, what do you think of this?’ with a jerk of her finger toward London. ‘Do you think he’s any good? He’s painting me, you know,’ she added, without at all lowering her natural voice.

Faces had been turned angrily toward them. There was now a shocked ‘s-sh’! London gave a furious start, coughed fiercely, and then, seeing the Weatherford commission, he coughed again apologetically, and went on painting. Lola continued to stare at Derrock, without any appearance of interest, but as if her gaze were too heavy to be easily removed.

‘Why don’t you come to see me?’ she said. ‘You know where I live. There’s always tea at five, except days when I’ve got a matinee.’

‘Thanks,’ said Derrock. ‘But you’re forgetting that I’ve just now got to know you. How could I have come before.’

‘You could have known me any time, if you’d wanted to.’

‘And me—can’t I come to tea, too?’ asked Lloyd.

‘Oh, I don’t want you,’ returned Lola, without even looking at him. She looked at Derrock powerfully, blankly, and suddenly smiled, ever so little, just a curving of the corners of her mouth, but it turned her blank beauty into something so sensually seductive, so suggestive, that he felt as if he had been suddenly sprayed with a potent aphrodisiac. He choked and stammered with the shock of it.

‘Thanks . . . yes! Yes . . . thanks! I’ll certainly come.’

‘That’s all right then,’ Lola’s face returned to its heavy vacuity. ‘Did you know that London’s painting my portrait? Have you seen it? Come along

and I'll show it to you. I know where it is—right over there against the wall.'

She got up and moved toward the other side of the studio. At this outrageous disturbance there was another startled 's-s-sh'. Miss London, hovering benevolently about, looked shocked as at a sacrilege. Derrock was horribly embarrassed, but he had to follow Miss Matanzas, while she went almost to the edge of the model stand and took out her canvas, that was faced against the wall.

'Here it is. Do you think it's any good?' she said loudly.

This was too much. Wellington London coughed explosively, ferociously, and laid down his brushes.

'Ha!' he barked. 'Time's up. All done for to-day. Ha! Ha!'

The studio rose into life, stirred into sound. The major arose stiffly; he stepped ponderously down, in pomp of scarlet and gold.

'Got it nearly done, London? Let's have a look at it. Come on, I want to see it. I can't give you more than a couple more sittings anyhow.'

'Oh yes, do let us see it. Show it to us, Mr. London, please!' the women chattered.

London was reluctant. He hated to show his pictures half finished, but there were many thousands of dollars of possible business in that room, and he could not risk giving offence. So he took down the wet canvas unwillingly, and stood it against the easel-leg to face the room.

'Well, what do you think of it? Is it any good?' Miss Matanzas insisted, still presenting her own portrait, and quite ignoring the major's.

'I think it's going to be bully,' Derrock said.

He perceived at once that London and Lola had been created for one another. The portrait was nowhere near completion, but its essential qualities were already there. It represented the famous Spanish-Cuban actress in full face, with her famous stare, blank as a dinner-plate, and her large eyes like empty ink-wells. London would get this effect to admiration. Her immense blankness was exactly the quality of his genius, and the picture was going to be as good as a photograph.

'It's certainly going to be one of London's greatest successes.'

Lola looked at him without any gratitude, studied the portrait critically herself, and then faced it back against the wall.

‘I’ve had about all I can stand of this joint,’ she said loudly. ‘I’ve got Wallie’s car here, and I promised to bring it back early. Are you going anywhere? I’ll drive you if you like.’

‘But aren’t you going to stay for some tea. They always have tea at this stage.’

Everybody was crowding up to look at the major’s portrait, with cries and chirps of admiration. What glory of colour! What flesh tones! What cast shadows! Sargent, Picasso—Rembrandt! The phrases were all ready and overflowing, having been bottled up for the last hour.

‘Wouldn’t those red tones remind you exactly of Cezanne, my dear? Or perhaps, of Augustus John?’

London took this as no compliment, for these painters were his horror. But from long experience he knew what was coming to him, and he set his teeth and held his tongue.

Mr. Charlemagne Roncesvalles arose, limping slightly on his cane, and made his way up to the picture. Everybody stood respectfully back while he considered it in silence for some minutes. Then he turned without saying a word, and limped back to his seat again, portly and puissant, smiling secretively in his beard, as if he had a vast number of opinions which he was not at present prepared to impart to anybody.

‘Good likeness—what?’ said London.

‘You’ve got the uniform right—that’s all I know about it,’ the major wheezed.

‘You’ve made the major look like a stormy sunset. You should have painted him as a landscape,’ said Lloyd irreverently.

London looked at the speaker with indignation; then, remembering that Lloyd was a pressman, he coughed and smiled feebly. He raised his voice in a shout:

‘Tea! Tea! What about tea, Blanche?’

Miss London had it all ready. Instantly she wheeled a great loaded tea-wagon from an adjoining room, and began to pass around cups, plates of sandwiches, bread and butter, little cakes. There was a relieved settling down, a movement, a clatter, a sound of eating and drinking, and nobody thought about the picture any more except London and the major, both of whom continued to glance at it surreptitiously from time to time.

Miss Matanzas took a cup of tea, but would not eat anything. Edgar Lloyd, his mouth full of sandwiches, drinking gulps of hot tea, was talking with intense seriousness into the ear of the great art critic.

‘. . . still in the palaeolithic age of poetry, the stone age, the bone age, Roncesvalles. Now the new symbolism . . .’

‘Yes . . . yes . . .’ said the critic, looking about in distress. ‘Excuse me a moment, Lloyd. I must go and speak to Miss Matanzas.’

But Lola saw him coming.

‘I’m off. Will you ride across town with me?’ she said to Derrock, and made for the door.

Many eyes had been on her, however, and her departure was going to leave a perceptible vacuum in the room. London and his sister rushed after her, through the tea-drinkers. Blanche beamed on her, calling her ‘my dear!’

‘You must come and lunch with us at the studio, any day.’

London shook her hand warmly, and even patted her shoulder.

‘Don’t forget. Our next sitting is next Tuesday. I’m going to do something quite stunning with it.’

Edgar Lloyd also hurried after them, his mouth full of sandwiches and unexpressed theory. He followed them down in the elevator and out to the street, where Weatherford’s great maroon Cadillac was waiting empty. Miss Matanzas got in behind the wheel, beckoned Derrock to sit beside her, while Lloyd, without being invited, climbed into the back seat. He leaned forward and spoke into Lola’s neck.

‘What do you think about the Black Belt decision, Lola? Have you got anything on it? Hasn’t Wallie said anything to you about it?’

She paid him no attention, but started the car and turned skilfully out into the street. It was the crowded hour, and the street was jammed with traffic, but she was no more concerned than as if she had been alone on a country road. Derrock winced and caught his breath as she slipped in and out, violating the traffic laws, taking hair-breadth chances, apparently escaping destruction by a series of miracles of dexterity. She was a driver, that was plain. Besides, it wasn’t her car. If she smashed it, Wallie could easily buy another.

She narrowly beat a traffic light, and a policeman bellowed after, and perhaps took her number, but she paid no attention at all. Wallie would pay

the traffic fines.

‘I rather like you, you know. I’ll expect to see you,’ she tossed aside to Derrock, without taking her eyes from the squirming traffic.

‘I know you’ve got some notion about it, Lola. How’s Coke going to go to-morrow—up or down? Think of all the good press notices that I’ve got for you, Lola—not that you needed them. You’re far beyond press notices. But what do you think Coke will do to-morrow—down or up?’

He was speaking close into her ear, but she paid him no attention at all.

‘Are you in this gambling game too?’ she asked Derrock, with just a flicker of her eyes aside at him. Somehow in that flicker Derrock got the idea that Lola did know something, that she held the golden secret.

‘I might be, if I knew which way to play it.’

She pulled up with a shudder and a shock that shook the car as a huge truck thundered out from a side street. Letting the clutch in again she swerved in and out the dense traffic like a high-powered comet with a demon riding it. By miracle, without any accident, she arrived in front of the Imperial Royal Hotel, and pushed the car into a brief space by the kerb, where it seemed to fit as tightly as a cork in a bottle. Derrock opened the door and got out, but Lloyd detained the driver.

‘Tip us off, Lola—up or down?’ he pleaded, laughing.

Wallie Weatherford was waiting on the pavement under the big portico, talking with a couple of men, and he was looking rather bloated and over-prosperous, Derrock thought, already drinking too deeply of the wine of luck, and maybe of Government Control liquor too. Unknown three years before, he had become the spoilt child of fortune, a spender, a speeder, a sport; and he was going to build a great mansion on the Hill, though he was unmarried and had no use for a house. Derrock had hoped to get the decoration contract for that mansion, but now he didn’t so much care.

Wallie came quickly to the kerb, for he had been impatient for his car.

‘You promised to be back an hour ago, Lola,’ he complained. ‘Damn it, I was just going to call a taxi.’

Miss Matanzas looked at him without any expression whatever, and slowly got out of the car. Wallie nodded to Derrock, whom he knew only slightly, and probably did not identify. But Lloyd, who knew everybody, knew Wallie well. He drank with him, played bridge with him, read him his poems.

‘How’s the game going to go to-morrow, Wallie?’ he asked. ‘I hear you’ve got some scent of the merger decision.’

The gambler gave him a smiling, ironical glance, and looked at Derrock.

‘You’re not interested in this game, are you?’

‘Anybody would be interested if he knew how it was going to go to-morrow.’

‘Give him a hint, Wallie,’ Lola put in, surprisingly ‘Up or down. Darn it, what’s a tip?’

Weatherford glanced at Lloyd and laughed, and Lloyd laughed too, rather unwillingly. They both knew that this would be no ordinary tip, not the sort of tip to pass along.

‘But I’ll tell you one thing, Wallie,’ said Lloyd earnestly. ‘The whole market is going to start moving to-morrow. No matter which way Coke goes, there’s going to be a big stir in the whole list, especially the low-priced industrials. Now I’ve been looking into the technical position of Michigan Underwear, and I think it’s very shaky. The stock is heavily over-bought, and . . .’

‘I’m in a hurry, Lloyd. Get in with me if you want to talk about it,’ said Weatherford; and Lloyd got into the car again, still talking rapidly, quite forgetful of his late companions. The car backed out, turned, shot away westwards. Derrock was left with Miss Matanzas.

‘Well, is it going to be up or down?’ said Derrock, laughing.

Lola smiled at him again, not seductively, but curiously, seriously, inquiringly.

‘You’re coming to see me, aren’t you? When?’

‘The sooner the better,’ said Derrock.

He went with her through the hotel lobby, over to the elevators. There was a crowd of people, a clashing of elevator gates.

‘Going up?’

A crowd was piling into the up-bound lift. Derrock watched her go, lost sight of her, and turned away as the lift rose. The next moment her hand touched his shoulder. She hadn’t gone. She said something in a low voice, and pointed significantly upward. The noise of the crowd almost drowned what she said, but Derrock caught the words—‘up . . . for certain’.

‘What? Up? You mean it?’ he exclaimed.

She nodded confidently.

‘To-night,’ she said, slipping back into the current of people and into the next up-going elevator.

Derrock stood staring after her.

Up! To-night!

He hurried out of the hotel, and along King Street, to find a broker.

CHAPTER II

Even in a palace, said the Stoic Emperor, life may be lived well; and Derrock began to think that it might be so even in Toronto. He had been accustomed to abuse his city, as all his friends did. All the sporting set, all the arty crowd vilified it as one of their staples of conversation. The sportsmen despised it because it did not sufficiently resemble Chicago and Havana; the artists because it did not sufficiently resemble Paris and Munich. They called it a slow place, a dull place, where English snobbery met American vulgarity and each thrived on the other; where the police would not let you drink standing up, and where there was no subsidized theatre. They called it a half-grown city, a nest of Methodists and Orangemen, of Puritans and Pharisees, who had not yet learned that Queen Victoria was dead. They called it a rube town, a hick town, an overgrown tank-town, with half a million people who confused DADA with Santa Claus. Derrock had called it all these things himself. But now he perceived how entirely he had been wrong. All that was the bunk.

Happy people, well-dressed people, brilliant people filled the pavements. In a slow stream the shining motors rolled along the street in the warm spring evening, rolling through the dusty, hazy twilight scented with spring and petrol. In the hardly growing dusk the electric lamps beamed faintly, like kindly works of supererogation. Dance music came in jets out of the swinging doors of the tea-rooms, and pretty painted faces swarmed in and out the doors, letting out the jets of music. The theatre signs began to flash and wink—'Follies of 1950'—'The Girl of the Golden West'. Advertisements of ginger ale, of silk stockings, flamed against the still luminous sky. Not to be outdone, the cathedral held up an illuminated cross in the east, but it made a poor show among the follies and stockings.

The great shiny motors slid smoothly past. He would have a good car at once, he thought, though he had not driven a car for years, and then only a model T Ford. But he had the right tip now, and he also had the punch and he could have anything.

He thought of Larry Donovan's letter with ever-renewed delight. Derrock had taken himself and his work quite seriously; but man was not made for decoration. It was the other way about, and as little of it as possible. What you wanted was the right proportions, the clear hard lines, not the fluffy stuff. He thought of Erma Frieslander, with the ugly face and

the exquisite body, as he had seen it in the clinging wet silk on the bathing beach. She had denied it to him, though she had let him kiss her unbeautiful face, that was always hot and feverish and eager. He thought of Lola Matanzas, who probably would not deny anything to anybody, if he had the price. A great shiny car stopped at the kerb in front of him, and a girl got out, a slight slim flapper, in yellow stockings and a yellow dancing frock. She had a lovely, wide-eyed childish face; she seemed to sparkle all over with the sheer joy and jazz of life; and she was rouged like a whore. A young man in the uniform of a flying officer was with her. She caught Derrock's eye, and gave him the open, impudent smile of a naughty child.

'Hello, Doris!' he heard somebody say.

He knew her well, but at that moment he couldn't place her; his mind was clogged with other matters. Around the corners of King and Yonge Streets the crowd swirled in a reel of dust and petrol, follies and stockings. On these corners stood the tall buildings of the Canadian Pacific Railway, of the Canadian National Railway, of the Bank of Montreal and of the Board of Trade. Here if anywhere beat the great heart of Toronto, and it would go on beating until after eleven o'clock. Just around one corner was the vast and exclusive Imperial Royal Hotel, and around another corner was the even vaster and more exclusive Viceroy. These hotels had wine and beer parlours, where the police would not let you drink standing up. There were two government liquor stores, crammed to the roof with Scotch and Irish, champagne, arrack, Jamaica rum, Falernian, Palestine spirits and domestic rye. It was the theatre district, the hotel and restaurant district, and all the interstices were filled up with barber shops, lunch-counters, tobacco shops, necktie shops, tea-rooms. The Maple Leaf for ever! Derrock thought. O Canada, we stand on guard for thee! Slim flappers, pretty painted faces, sweet stuff, strong stuff, and a market on which he had a straight tip! Even in Toronto life might be lived well!

He had never in his life put a bet on the stock market, but he knew the general procedure from being in and out the brokerage offices, and from the incessant talk of Edgar Lloyd. He was prepared to risk a couple of thousand on Lola's tip—the amount he was going to get from Larry Donovan. He knew many brokers, but it was far too late now to expect to find them in their offices, unless they happened to be delayed by unusual business. Yet he must find one. Lola had said 'to-night', he was certain that she knew something. Something might happen before morning. The Coke decision might become known. It leaked out, as Lloyd said, by a process of telepathy;

and he was determined to put up his bet that night, to be filled at the opening market.

The brokerage offices were dark, and Derrock thought of trying to find some of the men at the National or the Albany Club. But as he turned down the Bay Street corner he saw a light in the windows of the ground-floor offices of Danforth & Pape, the firm he knew best. He stopped, and met Danforth himself, coming down the steps, about to go home.

‘Hold on, Danforth. Wait a minute. I’ve got business with you.’

Danforth took him back to the empty office, whence everybody had gone.

‘What margin are you asking on Infernal Coke?’

‘Going to gamble a little, Rock? Long or short?’

‘Long.’

‘The general opinion is all the other way, you know. Have you got any special information?’

‘No, but I’ve got a hunch.’

‘I see. Well, on hunches we generally ask fifty to a hundred points margin. How much do you want to play?’

Derrock told him, and Danforth pondered, smiling.

‘Well, I wouldn’t do it for the general public, of course, but I’ll let you come in at ten points margin, if you’ll put a three-point stop-loss order with it. Yes, and I’ll want you to stick around our office all day, to be ready to tell us just what you want at any moment. The general opinion is very bearish, and when she starts she’ll go fast.’

It did not sound encouraging. Derrock hesitated, but he thought of Lola’s up-pointing hand. He sat down at Danforth’s desk and wrote a cheque for the margin.

‘At the opening market,’ said the broker. ‘All right. You’re on. This is the way I make my living, but you’re putting your money on the turn of a card, my boy, and very likely stacked cards at that, unless you know a good deal more about it than I do.’

Derrock went away rather shaken. It was the first time he had tried this form of gambling, and there didn’t seem much fun in it. It was too much like the formal process of depositing your money in a bank that had an even

chance of failing within twenty-four hours. The quick flicker of the roulette wheel, the crowd and flash of the race track, the changing glimmer of cards on the green cloth—these had a good deal more decorative quality. You got something for your money, even if you lost. He had the tip, to be sure; but then, even Wallie Weatherford might have been mistaken, or Lola might have misunderstood.

He went away and ate his dinner alone, rather depressed now. He had a couple of thousand staked on the game—The *Danger* cheque. But perhaps he would never get the cheque. If Infernal Coke should rise ten points he would double his money; but if it dropped ten points he would lose it all; and it might easily drop to almost nothing if the merger decision should go against it.

He went back to his office, which Florence the secretary had locked up and abandoned. He sat down beside the scraps of dry sandwiches and cake that Lloyd had left. He felt that he needed a drop of whisky; but the bottle stood empty. Greatly depressed by this, he thought of the Swinburne that Lloyd had been quoting—

‘Now all strange hours and all strange loves are over,
Dreams and desires and sombre songs and sweet . . .’

Derrock liked Swinburne. He was old-fashioned, silly, out of date, but Derrock couldn't help being affected by those powerful, strong rhythms which, Lloyd said, didn't mean anything.

He tried to think about the new novel he was going to write for *Danger*, but he thought instead about Tuscaloosa, in the State of Oklahoma. He had heard all about it from Bob McDonald, who had just come back from there. It was a marvellous place, a fantastic place, a country of hot swamps and of deep black soil that would grow anything, only that it was all drenched with petroleum. According to McDonald, it was an almost tropical place, and an entirely fabulous one. Huge jets of burning gas and oil flared a hundred feet into the air, unquenchable, making the night brighter than the day. Torrents of oil flowed wastefully into the rivers, potential fuel for a million motors. Much of this oil had been discovered on the lands of Indians, who had been made millionaires over-night. They did not know what to do with their money. They bought Packard cars, imitation diamonds at double the price of real ones, fabricated champagne at a higher rate than Pommery. Their women walked the street with verminous bodies swathed in priceless silks and sables and black fox furs in the semi-tropical sun. Adventurers had made a regular industry of seducing and marrying these women for their

money, so that the Government had been obliged to appoint special police for their protection. In great tents men gambled all night in the shares of the new oil companies, as at the old frontier faro tables; and in the heat and smoke the whole land seethed in a froth of gunpowder, oil and gold. That was the place for a *Danger* novelist, for a writer of red-blooded melodrama.

A few minutes after trading opened on the New York Exchange next day Derrock went down to Danforth & Pape's office, shaken with irregular waves of hope and panic. He didn't know this game, and he was already feeling very chilly in the feet. The customers' room was full of men, all smoking, nervous, expectant, and from the talk Derrock gathered that they were all bearish. The decision would not be given out till noon, but Infernal Coke had opened a little lower. There wasn't much trading in it, but it slipped down by eighths, in small lots—36—35-7/8—35-3/4. Derrock's heart slid down with it. Danforth came out of the inner office and looked at him pityingly.

'I got your order executed at the opening price, but I'm afraid you've put your money on the wrong horse, my boy. All the feeling in New York is bearish. They've got an idea which way the cat is going to jump. What do you want to do now—cut your losses, or wait and see?'

'Inf Coke 35-1/2' said the illuminated strip of ticker tape projected on the screen. Derrock really felt like cutting his losses, but his spirit rebelled against Danforth's tone, with its compassionate contempt of the expert for the sucker. He made a quick mental calculation of how much money he had in the bank.

'Buy me another hundred if it touches 35,' he said.

'You may be a dead game sport, but I'll say you're a damn fool,' said Danforth. 'You're on, but stick close around here and watch it.'

Coke continued to sag slowly, touched 35, and Derrock had another block of stock and a reputation as a dead game sport. For a long time the market was very quiet. No transactions in Coke came over the wire; everything was waiting now on the decision.

Derrock went out and walked nervously around two blocks, and drank coffee at a lunch-counter, for he had made a poor breakfast. Returning to the brokerage office just before noon, he found Infernal Coke unchanged. Just as the hour struck, it was quoted up an eighth, and then another eighth, though it was too soon for the decision to have been promulgated. At five minutes after twelve it soared suddenly up to 35-1/2, and then a large block

at 36. Danforth burst out of the private office, seized Derrock's arm and dragged him up to the chattering ticker.

'Blk Blt merger confirmed,' the tape was reeling off. 'Inf Coke 1500 at 37. Inf Coke 2500 at 37-1/4.'

'You've picked the winner. I take off my hat to you, my boy! You've called the turn. What do you want to do now—let her roll and ride? She'll go with the brakes off, now she's started.'

'How far do you think she'll go?'

'Maybe forty—fifty. No telling. Or she might run into a set-back.' Danforth looked suddenly wise and shrewd. 'Can't tell what the Coke crowd may be putting over. Can't tell anything about this game.'

'I think I'll let her roll for a while.'

'Well, stay close and watch her. If you want to buy any more you can do it on easy margin, while this rush lasts. Five points.'

'You might as well buy me another hundred at the market,' Derrock said, with an air of indifference.

Yet he felt scared, excited, as if he were in a car that had got out of control and was speeding itself. He gazed at the little moving scrap of ticker tape projected on the screen, exactly like the figured ribbon of a speedometer. Inf Coke 38.

The outer office filled up with emotional men, looking, or trying to look as if they were winning heavily, all of them with eyes fixed on the speedometer. The whole list was moving up now, in sympathy with Coke. Buying was brisk. Cheques and slips were going and coming over Danforth's counters. Coke continued to move, continued to roll the right way, up to 39-1/2, and then there was a check.

'Inf Coke 38-3/4,' the speedometer said. 'Inf Coke 38-1/2.'

Everybody stopped talking, almost stopped smoking, hanging on the voice of the oracle. Was it the set-back, the reverse movement, or was it only a last desperate rally of the bears. Selling was heavy at 38-1/2, but it seemed to be well taken up; and then the tape read 38-3/4, and then 39 again, and then it jumped to 40 on a flurry of buying.

'She's safe to go now,' somebody said.

Derrock fled from the office. He couldn't stand watching and listening any longer, and he no longer thought that stock-playing was a less exciting

game than roulette. He went back to his own studio, and Florence looked at him curiously as he passed her desk. Probably he looked over-wrought.

He glanced at the time, and then began to eat large pieces of dry cake, exactly like Edgar Lloyd. Innumerable, interminable minutes went by. After waiting as long as he could endure, Derrock telephoned the gambling office. Coke was at 43, and still strong.

‘But it’ll probably react towards the end of the day,’ Danforth warned him. ‘Let me know what you want to do.’

‘I haven’t the least idea,’ said Derrock. ‘Please handle the thing as if it were your own. Make all you can out of it, but I must have the whole trade closed out to-day.’

He couldn’t have carried the weight of it over night and into another day. He sat back and speculated on how much he might be going to win. Five thousand? Ten thousand. A mint of money, anyway—more than he had ever had all at once before. At this moment Florence tapped at his door, and announced Mr. Solway Leviticus.

Derrock had forgotten all about him, though he had an appointment to see him that day, about the decoration for Mr. Leviticus’ house—a huge, solid Victorian mansion with innumerable square high rooms. But nothing could have pleased Derrock less than the visit at that moment, and he gave Mr. Leviticus an imitation of Lola’s famous stare.

But Solly Leviticus did not mind. He was tall and fresh and blond and middle-aged, and English from his hat to his boots. He carried a rough stick, and wore rough brown tweeds, made by his own tailor in London. Everything he had was imported from England, even his collar-studs, even the accents of his voice. He was a sportsman, a man about town, and he patronized the arts, as a gentleman should. It was said that he had given Lola Matanzas her start, before Wallie Weatherford took her up.

He sat down cheerfully, put his hat and stick on the table and cast an appreciative glance around the room, which he had never seen before.

‘Really, quite a rippin’ place you’ve got here,’ he observed genially. ‘Must be a good advertisement. Sample of your work, eh, what? Dropped in to see you about that little job of mine.’

It wasn’t a little job. It was a very big job, an almost impossible job to do with any credit. You couldn’t do anything with that great, dingy, ill-proportioned building. But the job would pay well, and Derrock had wanted it. But he didn’t want it now.

‘Have you thought of any fresh plans? Can’t say we quite liked your first scheme of decoration, but we still think you’re the man to do a top-hole job for us.’

‘No, I haven’t. I haven’t thought about it all,’ Derrock said.

Mr. Leviticus looked surprised. He was a business broker. He bought and sold businesses of all sorts bankrupt businesses, weak businesses, going concerns. Sometimes he wrecked them and sold the scrap, and sometimes he financed them and patched them up and sold them again; but he generally made twenty per cent profit.

‘We might run out and look the house over again, if you like. My car’s downstairs.’

‘You don’t need an interior decorator,’ said Derrock. ‘What you want is a gang of carpenters. Have them tear out a lot of partitions and lower the ceilings until you get the rooms into the right proportions. Any architect will tell you how they ought to be, and you’ll probably have to take out all the windows and put them in differently. Then take a spade and knock off all those hellish stucco ornaments, and make the walls a dark flat grey for a groundwork, and lay a floor with some character to it, some effect of contrasting woods, and tear down that house next door that cuts off your light. Then you’ll have rooms that don’t need any decoration, nor any furniture either. It’ll give you a nice feeling just to look at them quite empty. But now your rooms are just ugly square boxes. What do you expect me to do with them?’

‘By Jove, you don’t talk as if you wanted the job at all,’ Mr. Leviticus said.

‘Excuse me just a moment. I must telephone.’

He learned that Coke was now at 45, and still going strong. With a warm internal glow, he turned back to his client.

‘You can’t make something out of nothing,’ he said didactically. ‘You want something beautiful but it can’t be built on a background of ugliness. I can’t make the background. I’m not a creator. I’m only a decorator. The two things are very different,’ and as he pronounced these words he realized that he had unwittingly chanced on the key of all artistic criticism.

‘Nix, however, on the highbrow stuff!’ he murmured.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I was merely saying that we must lower the ceilings.’

‘Gad, you don’t seem to care whether you do business or not,’ said Mr. Leviticus, not at all offended.

‘I don’t care a damn. I don’t need to. I had private information on the stock market, and I’ve been in on the rise in Infernal Coke all day. I’ve made a thousand dollars while you’ve been in this room. I expect to clear twenty thousand before trading closes.’

Mr. Leviticus arose and took his stick and hat, with a glance at Derrock of smiling admiration and entire incredulity.

‘I don’t mind saying that my wife is determined to have you for our job. If it’s a question of your price, I’ll meet your terms—at least in any reasonable way.’

‘Nothing doing!’ said Derrock. ‘I don’t want to take on any contracts at present. In fact, I’m going to sell this decorating business’—for this idea had just occurred to him. ‘I have so many other more important interests that I really haven’t the time to devote to it.’

Mr. Leviticus had turned away, but, hearing these words, he turned quickly back again. His Englishness seemed to fall away from him, and he became much more natural. He cast a swift, appraising glance about the room, the glance of a veteran auctioneer; he approached Derrock and leaned over the table to him. Was it illusion, or did Derrock hear the ghost of a voice under the English accents—

‘How mooch you vant?’

It did not take long to make the deal. When it had been concluded, Derrock felt a delighted relief, like a man who has fallen into the sea and succeeds at last in shaking off his expensive heavy overcoat. A small cheque was passed to bind the bargain; for the rest, papers would have to be drawn up, and Solway Leviticus’s word was as good as any certified cheque.

Derrock rang up the broker again. Coke was at 48, but showed signs of slowing down. Danforth had bought in and again, and now he spoke of going a little short for the reaction. Derrock didn’t understand the game, but he knew that Danforth was beating it for him. How much was he going to win? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? A mint of money anyway, more than he had ever had at once in his life. But then, he had never had the right tip before.

He looked around now with some affection at the arty atelier which he hardly owned any longer. He would have to find a new place to write his new novels for *Danger* in. Of course he would take away his personal articles of furniture, his typewriter, his radio in the walnut Louis Seize case. Florence would have to find a new job, though probably she could stay as secretary for the new incumbent, for Leviticus was going to keep the business going.

Derrock thought he might even buy and take away one of the small landscapes on the walls, perhaps the poetical landscape by Jimmy Fitzgerald, the Irish-Canadian painter, all weeping mists and white birches. 'Spring Melody' it was called. Perhaps in fifty years it might be very valuable. In fifty years its sentimental dilution of nature might have acquired a quaint old-fashioned charm, like something very early Victorian, a Keepsake or a Sampler. He wanted greatly to telephone again, but he restrained himself. To divert himself, he turned on the radio. A Russian tone-poem burst into the room like a blast of death and midnight, coming from some highbrow symphony concert, perhaps in Moscow, perhaps in Los Angeles. That wasn't what he wanted at all. Can the arty stuff! He shifted the dial through a spatter of speech and music, till a rapid swirl broke out from an afternoon fox-trot orchestra probably here in Toronto. Round and round the music reeled and swirled, and then a voice began to chant:

'Where'd you get those lips?
Where'd you get those eyes?
Where'd you get those dimples, honey?
Where'd you get that smile so sunny?
O honey,
Please make me happy,
And put me wise.'

He didn't want to telephone Danforth again, but he had to know. He went down to King Street again, but not to Danforth & Pape's office. He was afraid to go there, afraid of what decisions he might be asked to make, in this game that he didn't know. He wanted to leave it all to Danforth, who would steer him straight.

So he went into another brokerage office, and watched the flicker of the illuminated speedometer ribbon. Coke was at 49-1/2, and within a few minutes it went up in a flurry of trading, up a whole point at a time, until it went an eighth over 55. With a backward rush it surged down again, down to 52. Derrock's heart was in his mouth; it looked like collapse; but it was

close to the end of the day's trading. It swung up to 54, reacted to 51, and closed at 52-1/2.

On his way to Danforth & Pape's he bought a box of the most expensive cigarettes he could find, and discovered that he had less than a dollar left in his pockets. But that did not matter now. The customers and the loungers were going away from Danforth's office, talking excitedly, saying they had expected it all along. Trading was over. The cashier and bookkeepers were sweating over settlements, but everybody was happy, as they always are on days of a bull market. It was with difficulty that Derrock got Danforth's attention.

'How much . . .?'

'I don't know. Haven't had time yet to figure it out. It was bought and sold in lots at different prices—I've the slips here somewhere. Sixteen or eighteen thousand, I'd think. Damn it, you don't expect me to carry twenty accounts in my head, all at once, do you? You don't need any money right now. I'll mail you a cheque to-morrow. Gad, it's been a fierce afternoon!'

'You might let me have a couple of hundred, if you've got it handy.'

What was a couple of hundred? Yesterday it had been a very considerable sum, but to-day—nothing! Danforth, however, had only fifty dollars handy in bills, but he gave Derrock a cheque for a hundred and fifty.

Glowing inwardly, smoking his expensive cigarettes, Derrock went out into the warm, late afternoon. The asphalt sidewalk felt resilient like rubber under his feet; and it glowed with lilac and smoke-grey and heliotrope—all sorts of delightful hues. It was crowded with people, happy people, attractive people, brilliant and talented people, going to the hotels, to the amusement places, to the dancing tea-rooms. Jets of fast fox-trot music burst out as the doors swung open. Joyful people thronged the government liquor stores, carrying away flagons of aqua-vitae, of Falernian, of Johnnie Walker. Fortunate people thronged the office of the Canadian National Railways, buying tickets to go away. Just around the corner was the British Imperial Mission, that looked after the English immigrants who had come to Canada on a wrong tip, and could not find anything to do. It was a charitable place, and if an Englishman had no money he was allowed to sleep on the floor without paying a cent. Queer figures prowled about its doors, shabby, shuffling people, who looked as if they would be better dead, or even back in England. They looked strangely unreal, and almost theatrical against the brilliance of King Street. One of these supernumeraries caught Derrock's eye, hesitated, stepped forward, spoke.

‘I say, gov’nor, you couldn’t spare me the price of a bit of supper, could you?’

What an actor! Derrock thought, and what a make-up! noting the man’s air of mingled furtiveness and daring, the tone of desperation in his gruffness, his sunken, unshaven cheeks, his hollow eyes, his clothes that looked as they had lain for weeks on the Mission floor. He took out a five-dollar bill.

‘Blarst yer!’ said the actor, recoiling. ‘I didn’t know I’d struck a bloomin’ Rockefeller. Change it, gov’nor. I didn’t want no quid, only a shilling—a quarter. I’ve got the promise of a job to-morrow.’

‘Blarst yer eyes!’ said Derrock. ‘Yer must be a ruddy Bolshevik. Here, tyke it. And these!’ He thrust the bill into the man’s hand, and also his packet of expensive cigarettes, and walked on, glowing with generosity.

What was a quid? He had paid more at a box office to see a worse performance. What were four-shilling cigarettes? At the next tobacco shop he bought a packet of even more costly cigarettes, and walked on, smoking them, delighting in the spectacle of life. The window of a florist was piled with orchids and violets and cannas and giant marigolds and roses that had been bribed to bloom out of season, with queer imported blossoms from the other side of the world, unnaturally coloured, spotted, perverse, the very rouge and jazz of Nature herself; and the contents of that shop were worth more than the produce of any farmer’s hundred acres. The shiny motors rolled along the street, full of brilliant people, of successful people, and each car cost more than the annual livelihood of a working man and his family; and Derrock felt all these things to be supremely right.

He entered the flower shop and ordered about twenty dollars’ worth of blooms to be sent to Lola Matanzas, for he thought he owed her that, at least. On second thought, he decided to carry them himself, for the hotel was only two blocks away. But they told him at the desk that Miss Matanzas had not yet come in, and he remembered that there was a matinee that afternoon. So he left the flowers to be sent up to her room, and seeing the chief clerk, whom he knew, he got his cheque cashed.

There was music and dancing in the hotel tea-room, and he went in and ordered tea, which he had no intention of drinking. Between the tea-tables, around the room that glittered with gold and purple, with mirrors and lights, the couples swayed and revolved, in blue and scarlet, black and white, crimson and green.

How'd you grow so sweet?
How'd you grow so nice?
O honey!
Please make me happy,
And put me wise.

Derrock had been put wise and now he was happy. Lulled and stimulated by the kick-kick of the fast fox-trot and the twirling dance frocks, he looked on, delighting in it all, without drinking his very expensive tea. There were plenty of people there whom he knew, but he did not want to dance, he did not want to speak to anybody. He observed Mr. Solway Leviticus with a dark handsome woman, but they did not notice him. He observed a girl that whirled past him several times, slim and pretty, in a dancing frock of pale yellow, sparkling, radiant, almost radio-active, rouged and lip-sticked and excited, looking like a virginal maenad. He remembered that he had seen her lately. He knew her, but he couldn't place her, though he had seen her often. When the music stopped she went back to her table, and began to finish her sundae with gusto. She turned her head and looked at Derrock over her shoulder, with the broad malicious smile of a bad baby.

'Hello, Doris!' somebody said.

Then he identified her—Doris Dovercourt, a decoration of the younger set, a set which Derrock had rather outgrown. He knew her partner, too, one of the honorary aides at Government House, but he did not want to speak to either of them. The afternoon dances were over anyhow; the orchestra stopped; people were going away. Derrock slipped out quietly and left the hotel.

He was going to take Erma Frieslander out to that long-postponed dinner. On his way across Adelaide Street he stopped at Jimmy Fitzgerald's studio, knowing that he would find neither women there nor tea. As he expected, the studio was half full of men, and there was a good deal of whisky going. Plump, rosy and bald, Jimmy poured the drinks lavishly and talked about racing, his chief interest next to art. He painted nothing but poems, spring songs, autumn reveries, which he called by sentimental titles, 'In the Gloaming', 'The Fairy Pool', and he had a hot tip for the King's Plate. This open bar was a business proposition, for Jimmy was a Presbyterian and a Belfast man. What was a hundred dollars for a poem in paint, after you had had four shots of Jimmy's Three-Star Irish? What would Jimmy have said if he knew that Derrock had suddenly risen into the picture-buying class himself. But Derrock did not tell him, and only bet him twenty dollars, even money, that Alcazar would not finish one-two-three.

He stayed a long time at the studio, for he liked Jimmy's sporting, commercial art, and besides, Jimmy could paint. When he went down to the street again, mellowed with several shots of Jimmy's Irish, he found that motors had their lights on, and that the street lights were overcoming the soft spring dusk. On his way to Erma's studio he bought more flowers. Crowds of working-folk were going homeward up Church Street; the trams were packed with them—tired people, harassed, grovelling people, better dead. Above the big garage on the corner he saw a light in Erma's windows, and he knew she was at home. He climbed a flight of dirty wooden stairs and knocked at a heavy, black-painted door. He saw the light through the keyhole, but it went out at once, and nobody answered. He knocked and knocked again, insisting, and at last the door opened about four inches. He saw an untidy dress, a paint-stained apron.

'What the hell . . .? Oh, it's you, is it, Ford? I don't want to see anybody!'

'I've got some flowers for you, Erma. Can't I shove them in?'

'I don't want them. Oh, well—come in.'

Derrock followed her into the huge dim room, where she had switched off all the lights. She did not turn them on again. A glow came in through the great window, and a few embers glimmered redly in the great brick fireplace. In the murk at the farther end stood a tall easel, holding a very large canvas, a blur in the gloom. In front of it was an easy chair, and Erma sank into it, in a sort of demoralized huddle.

'I didn't want to see you. I wrote you not to come.'

'I know you did, Erma, but I didn't get your letter. At least, I got it, but I haven't read it yet. I left it in a pocket of my other suit. What's the matter? I'm going to take you out to dinner at the Imperial Royal. I won fifty thousand dollars on the stock market this afternoon.'

'I don't want to go out to dinner.'

Derrock sat down and lighted another costly cigarette, offering the box to Erma. She shook her head; but she rummaged into the litter on her painting-table, twisted colour-tubes, charcoal, rags, brushes, and found a small black cigarette-like cigar, which she lighted.

'How's the "Chimaera" getting on?'

'It isn't getting on at all,' she answered dolefully, out of a cloud of strong smoke.

‘Let’s see it.’

Erma sat as if she had not heard him. In her huddled, graceless attitude Derrock thought she was the ugliest woman he had ever seen. Yet her body was most beautiful. He had seen its lines through the wet clinging bathing-suit, and she said that it had exactly the Greek proportions of rightness, and he believed her. But her face was not even pretty. He didn’t know exactly what was wrong with it; but what was a face? Her complexion was not good, and her lips always looked dry and hot, and she never used lipstick or rouge, and seldom even powder. Her eyes were a very dark blue, so dark that they looked black except in a very strong light; and her dark-brown hair, cut short, was so gossamer fine and silky that it would not stay in any position, but rose and waved about her head at the slightest movement, like smoke, like a disordered halo. And yet, in some moods, in some lights, she seemed beautiful—not now.

At last she got up in the dusky glow and turned on a powerful electric spotlight that focused on the easel. The picture sprang out in the sudden glare, like an act of creation. Derrock had seen the ‘Chimaera’ in all its stages, from the first idea, from the first sketch; and more than that he had heard all Erma’s excited talk about it; so that he had the picture in his mind as she had it in her imagination, not as it was now but as it was going to be.

It was almost life-size, and nowhere near finished, but even now Derrock saw it as it was going to be. Against a dark, rich background stood a woman’s figure, nude except for a careless fall of reddish-purple draperies from the waist to the knees. The figure stood strained and tense, the head thrown far back, the eyes half closed, and in her arms she clasped tightly to her breast a sort of animal whose teeth and claws seemed to be fastened in her flesh, while her face expressed the most passionate mingling of torture and ecstasy.

That was how it was to be, and that was how Derrock saw it in his mind; but it was not so yet on the canvas. Erma dropped in her chair again and scowled at the easel, flinging her little cigar among a hundred other little cigar-stubs on the floor around the easel.

‘I’ve been at this damned thing for three months now. I do believe I had it better the first time, but I painted it all out and started again. Of course all the foreshortening of the upper part is difficult, but I can do that—that’s not the trouble. It’s the expression. I can’t get a good model, for one thing. I’ve changed models three times, and that’s bad. I can see it in my mind, clear enough. It’s my hand, it’s my cursed hand, that won’t put it down.’

She held up a small, perfectly-shaped hand, dirty with paint and cigar-black, and looked at it with loathing.

‘Have you cried over it, Erma?’ Derrock asked sympathetically.

‘Cried? I’ve cried quarts. And cursed and raged and smoked a whole box of cigars. Nothing does any good.’ She gazed at the picture in misery, in hatred. ‘Oh, well, we may as well have a drink.’

Rummaging in a cupboard, she brought out a bottle of Jamaica rum and another of ginger ale. Derrock sipped this fizzy, sweetish mixture, which he did not much like, and looked at Erma with his customary, ever renewed surprise.

Whether she was nearer to twenty or to thirty he could never decide. She came of Flemish stock, but she was born and bred in Ontario. She had studied painting in Toronto, afterwards for a year or two in New York. But Erma painted by direct inspiration, and she had a tough native manner of her own, which none of her teaching had been able to affect very much, for better or worse. Sometimes she would paint like a Dutch master, but not for very long. Then for days she would bungle and blunder with perfectly childish incapacity, fighting herself with rage and tears, until she would throw it all up in a climax of fury, and not touch a brush for weeks. What she did during these periods Derrock didn’t know. Nobody saw her; but afterwards she would start afresh, with an improved technique, just as if she had spent the whole time in hard application.

There were no pictures or sketches at all hanging about the studio, none of the usual artistic lumber. What she did with her finished pictures Derrock didn’t know. Perhaps she never finished any of them; perhaps she burned them. He was pretty sure, at any rate, that she never sold them. She was not known at all among the Toronto painters, and she did not belong to the Women’s Art Association, nor to the Heliconian Club, nor to the Ontario Society of Artists, nor to any of the other arty clubs. Derrock could not imagine how she contrived to exist, for she seemed to have no money of her own, nor to know anybody; and yet she had lived for years in the big dingy studio and bedroom over the garage, living in a sort of rich squalor, and struggling almost always with tasks beyond her powers.

‘Never mind, Erma. I’m going to take you out to the most gorgeous dinner in town. This is my golden day, my lucky day. I’ve just sold my decorating business, and made a killing on the market.’

Without listening to him, Erma continued to gaze blackly at her picture.

‘I’ve got a big idea, Ford. It ought to be tragedy and comedy—a creation. I can see it all in my mind, so clearly. But do you know what it looks like now? It looks like a girl hugging a damned teddy bear.’

Derrock looked again, and he couldn’t deny it. It did look exactly like a girl hugging a teddy bear. Erma got up and went to the easel. She dipped the tip of her finger in a blob of paint on the palette and began to touch up the shadow under the nose of the thrown-back head. She stepped back, looked at it critically in the glare of the spotlight.

‘You can’t work at that to-night, Erma. You’ll ruin it! Change your dress and come out with me. Let’s go out and eat.’

‘I believe I’ve got an idea, Ford. I believe I know how to get it after all.’

She smiled back at him with a sudden enchanting smile, in a face that seemed suddenly altered by an inward radiance.

‘Are we going out to dinner, Ford? Thanks, awfully. I don’t believe I had much lunch to-day. I’ll be ready in just a minute.’

She gazed again at her picture, touched it up again, wiped her finger on her dress, then went into the adjoining bedroom and shut the door. Through the thin wood Derrock could hear the soft sound of her movements, the thump of shoes on the floor, the gentle rustle of falling garments, a splashing of water. He thought of her beautiful, rounded body with the perfect Greek proportions, divested of its painty rags. He thought of Infernal Coke and twenty thousand dollars, and a wave of the joy and jazz of life thrilled over him. He approached the closed door, and tapped on it.

‘Erma, let me come in.’

The rustling ceased. After some seconds Erma spoke sweetly through the closed door.

‘It’s bolted, Ford. Sit down and wait for me, or you can go to the devil with your dinner.’

It was the strong Flemish blood in her that gave her that tenacity, that obstinacy, that cussedness. He went back, disappointed, and looked at the teddy bear. The literary quality of the thing was what had impressed him, and yet Erma wasn’t in the least literary. But the conception was undoubtedly Stendhalian, and not without pure story quality as well. There might be a great philosophic drama in it, like a modern Faust. It might turn out something quite magnificent, as Erma said. On the other hand, it mightn’t, and most likely wouldn’t.

Erma kept him waiting a good many minutes, but when she came out she was dressed with quite unusual care, for her. She was wearing a dinner gown that he had never seen before, something of dark grey and amber, and she wore a string of amber beads that he had given her, and she had even used some powder. In the dimness of the studio her face was really pretty. In the dazzling glare of the Imperial Royal lobby it looked ugly again; but when they were in the restaurant, in the pinky glow of the little table lamps, she looked positively beautiful. Her blue eyes sparkled like black opals; she liked these little festivities, and she seemed greatly brightened up already.

‘We should have cocktails, but that’s impossible,’ Derrock said. ‘You can have spiritous liquors in the bedroom but not in the dining-room, for Toronto does not think it right to eat and drink at the same time. However, under the new dispensation, we can have wine.’

Derrock ordered a wine-card and commanded champagne. He knew nothing about wines, he did not know what was best, but he ordered what seemed most expensive.

‘Now, what shall we eat? What would you like, Erma?’ he asked, and immediately began to decide it himself. ‘A touch of hors-d’œuvres, of course. Then a thin soup, a consommé printanière. Afterwards, say, a soufflé of mushrooms, cooked as they do them awfully well here, with pullets’ eggs and green peppers, and, I believe, the tongues of nightingales. Then, for our main dish, suppose a Labrador pheasant, really guinea-fowl, you know, with ...’

‘It sounds delicious, Ford, dear. Please order whatever you’d like yourself. But what I’d like better than anything is a steak, a thick, tender one, with fried onions and mashed potatoes and plenty of gravy. I’m awfully hungry.’

‘You humiliate me horribly, Erma. I had meant to compose a dinner that would be a symphony, a poem, though I have really no gift for art. So let us can the arty stuff! I could eat a thick steak myself, for I don’t think I had any lunch. But we’ll have it smothered in mushrooms, and we’ll have a salad.’

The gold-topped quart bottle came rather too soon, along with a plate of little caviare sandwiches, but Derrock had it opened.

‘It’ll pass the time while we’re waiting for the steaks. Drink it up, Erma, and we’ll have another. This is my great day and nothing is quite good enough.’

Erma seemed to awaken to the idea that there was something special about this occasion.

‘Why all the splurge and extravagance, Ford?’

‘Because this is my lucky day, my golden day. I’ve just sold my decorating business to Solly Leviticus.’

‘Have you really?’ hearing the news for the first time.

‘Really and in fact. I did rather well on it too, for there really wasn’t much to sell, beyond the lease and the name and the good-will. Most of the furnishings were there on commission. The business will go as the Atelier Duroc, I understand, and Solly already has a decorator in view to take over the management; but I retire, resuming the discarded “k” in my name.’

Erma looked interested, pleased and puzzled. She drank her champagne and accepted another glass.

‘But what are you going to do now?’

‘I’m going to commence author.’

‘Are you really? I’m sure you’ll make a splendid author. When do you commence?’

‘I have commenced. My first novel is not only commenced, but completed; and not only completed but sold. Serial rights only. I reserve all the book rights and moving picture rights. I expect it will be put on the screen with wonderful success, but I haven’t gone deeply into that side of the matter yet. I am going to write another novel at once, and I will probably have to go away to get new material. Did you ever hear of Tuscaloosa, Oklahoma? The name alone is worth the money. Tuscaloosa, Oklahoma—it’s a line from Hiawatha. There are plenty of Indians there too. Indian women who have become oil-millionaires over-night drive sixteen-cylinder Cadillac cars through the mud, wearing diamonds in their moccasins, and sables worth the ransom of a Czar. The government is obliged to station special agents to prevent these women from being married by adventurers in the streets. The mud is all made of oil and gold-dust. Immense torches of flaming petroleum spout a hundred feet into the air, perpetually burning, and under their illumination rival bands of desperadoes battle with automatics for new oil sites. In great tents like circus marquees, engineers, bandits, hoboes and millionaires gamble all night on the shares of the new oil companies. Frequently a stock sells at ten cents in the evening and twenty dollars at dawn. Did I tell you that I won a great deal of money on Infernal Coke this afternoon?’

‘No, Ford!’ hearing it for the first time, with delighted surprise. ‘Did you really? How much did you win?’

‘Some thousands—perhaps twenty or thirty. I don’t exactly know yet. A mint of money, anyway. Have some, Erma. Let me lend you a little.’

‘Thanks, Ford. If you’ve really won as much as that, you might let me have fifty dollars.’

‘Sure, Erma—or five hundred. I’ll get a blank cheque from the waiter.’

‘I haven’t any bank account. But that will be all right. I’ll get Wallie Weatherford to cash it for me.’

‘No, I have fifty in cash on me, after all. What was I thinking of? Here’s the money, Erma. What has Weatherford to do with it? I didn’t know that you knew him.’

‘He’s going to buy the “Chimaera”, when it’s finished.’

‘I’ll buy it myself, at your own price.’

She laughed and shook her head. In the pinky lights she looked absolutely beautiful. The wine-bottle was getting low. Derrock had drunk most of it himself, and he ordered a supplementary pint. The steaks arrived, and Erma ate as if she were as hungry as she said. Derrock found himself ravenous, and his numerous drinks had cast a rosy screen before his eyes.

‘You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw, Erma. You should have been painted by the Pre-Raphaelites, by Whistler, by Augustus John. But no, you’re not the type of any of them. You’re solely your own type. You ought to paint your own portrait, Erma. Did you ever try? If I had the skill I would paint you myself, quite nude, against a background of pure gold such as the Tuscan’s early art prefers. Or you should have been painted by old Aristodorus of Syracuse. He was commissioned to paint the portrait of Cleantha, the mistress of the Tyrant of Chios, and the most beautiful woman in the whole world. But the portrait proved so much more beautiful than its subject that the tyrant turned his mistress into the street and ever after lived entirely with the picture. But that picture is now dead, Erma. Its canvas is rotted and its colours faded out into grey and black, for they had neither Winsor nor Newton in those days.’

‘And what became of poor Cleantha?’

‘She took other lovers, and died worth more than a million drachmas.’

‘Have you really sold your studio, Ford? Why did you do it? You were an awfully good decorator.’

‘I was much too good. I was getting to think myself, not a mere decorator, but an artist, a creator. A little more, and I might have been lecturing to women’s clubs on the Home Beautiful. But fortunately a revelation was vouchsafed me in time, a revelation from Chicago—cut out the highbrow stuff! Can the arty stuff!’

He passed his box of five-shilling cigarettes to Erma, and she lighted one. The smoke drifted through her hair that lifted and waved, itself like a drift of smoke.

‘Why don’t you publish your revelation, Ford? Perhaps more of the decorators would go out of business. For that’s what most of the painters are—just making something to decorate the wall of a room.’

‘True, Erma! But all that is quite right. Decoration is the whole thing. Art and science, literature and philosophy are only colour and paint for the wall. Unless, of course, you’re a creator and can build your own wall, and there aren’t any creators nowadays. A background of pale gold, with an intoxicating pattern of red and black on it—that’s the ideal. In fact, they tell us that there can’t possibly be any wall, that the decoration is the ultimate reality, and if you broke through the decoration you would find yourself nowhere at all, unless maybe in the fourth or fifth dimension.’

But Erma wasn’t at all philosophical, and she was thinking solely of her ‘Chimaera’.

‘But I don’t want to decorate anything, Ford. If I can ever paint a picture, I want it to be something that can stand alone. Something that has its own life.’

‘All the life is in you, Erma. Can you put it across?’

She seemed to glow, as she looked across the table through the cigarette smoke. In such moments of excitement, of enthusiasm, something in her seemed to burn up to the surface. There was an internal combustion in her.

‘If I can finish the “Chimaera” as I want it, I won’t sell it to either you or Wallie Weatherford. I’ll take it to New York or London. It would make my reputation quick enough, finished as I see it. I don’t want to exhibit it or sell it here. I don’t want to be a great Toronto artist, and I don’t know that even New York is big enough.’

‘Yet the big fish of the small pool has a very good time of it.’

‘If I had wanted to be a local artist I could have cut quite a figure in this town. I could have got a expensive studio, and spent a lot on clothes, and joined the women’s arty clubs, and served teas in the studio, and cadged for society commissions, and intrigued to get my pictures hung at the exhibitions. It would have taken influence and introductions and preparations and a lot of money, but I could have had them for the asking. But I’m not a bluffer, Ford. I couldn’t do it. Besides, the reward wasn’t big enough. I might struggle and intrigue to get a picture into one of the big European shows, but not into the Canadian National Exhibition.’

‘The “Chimaera” will get you into the big shows, Erma. You’re not eating your salad. How about coffee and a sweet?’

Erma sat glowing and palpitating, thinking about her picture. She never ate sweets.

‘Let’s go out, Ford. It’s been a lovely dinner, but I couldn’t eat anything more. I’d like a motor drive, a fast drive, a joy-ride.’

Derrock immediately had a message telephoned to Angus McMurrich’s garage, for the best car in the shop and a good driver. In five minutes a huge Lincoln was at the door, bigger than Wallie Weatherford’s saloon and twice as luxurious. It impressed even the hotel doorman; but Erma did not notice what sort of car it was.

The driver slid them dexterously through the crush of the King Street traffic, then up to Bloor Street and out westward to the suburbs, and as the traffic thinned the big machine hummed powerfully, speeding up. It turned out upon the Hamilton highway and speeded up further for Derrock had guaranteed the fines.

Between the market-gardens, the suburban bungalows they rolled smoothly at fifty, at fifty-five. Erma sat looking out the window beside her in silence, looking abstractedly at the whizzing landscape. Derrock turned off the overhead light, and slipped his arm around her, drawing her towards him. She sighed, and with her eyes shut she turned up her face not unwillingly to his kisses, nestling against him behind the blind back of the chauffeur. Cooksville village flickered past, a blaze of light from the service stations. Suddenly she drew away from him.

‘Please don’t, Ford! Tell the man to stop. I want to go back.’

‘Not yet. What’s the matter, Erma? We haven’t gone twenty miles.’

‘I want to go back. I’ve thought of something.’

They turned and went back not so fast as they had come. They stopped at the Church Street corner and Erma ran upstairs to her studio. Derrock paid off the driver, and followed her up.

She had turned on all the lights, had turned the spotlight on her picture, and without taking off her hat or coat she was painting with a tiny brush, working up the shadows about the mouth—the mouth that should convey such an expression of torture and ecstasy.

Derrock sat down and lighted the last of his expensive cigarettes. She didn't notice him. It was insane to try to paint by that light. She would ruin her picture; but there was no use speaking to her. She painted for some minutes, and then stood back to look at it. It didn't seem to have made much difference. She dropped into a huddled heap in the arm-chair and stared blackly at the canvas. For a long time she sat there, and Derrock sat in the background, without moving or saying a word.

‘Are you still there, Ford? I wish to God you'd go away!’

He went away quietly. From the door he looked back and saw her still in a graceless, forlorn huddle in the chair, scowling at the picture. She didn't notice him, and again he thought that she was the ugliest woman he had ever seen.

CHAPTER III

‘A car? A good used car?’ said Angus McMurrich, speaking with a strong Scottish burr. ‘You have come to the right place, Mr. Derrock. We have the best—I wouldna say the largest, maybe—but the maist complete stock of used cars in the city of Toronto. I shall see myself that you are well suited.’

When Angus spoke like this you couldn’t help believing him, and besides, he probably spoke the truth.

Derrock looked up and down the long shed filled with cars. Beside him, at the front, were the new cars, all glittering chromium and enamel, in view from the windows. Farther back were the used cars, cars of every sort, age and model, old cars, almost new cars, snappy sports cars, coupés, tourings, Packards, lorries, Fords. Derrock had little experience with anything but the model T Ford he had used years ago. Since then he had never owned a car. He could not afford a big car, and he found it cheaper to use Angus McMurrich’s hired car service when he wanted transportation.

But now everything was different. He could afford almost anything; not a new Packard, to be sure, but a good used car.

‘The maist complete stock,’ said Mr. McMurrich, ‘and I’ll dare say the cheapest, considering all things. For our cars are all in verra good mechanical condition, and maistly just overhauled. Now, you’ll be wanting a nifty small car, Mr. Derrock, a snappy Ford coop, maybe . . .’

‘No, I don’t want a small car,’ Derrock said.

Angus looked him up and down with consideration, as if he were taking Derrock’s measurement for a car. He was very tall and spare and grey-bearded, and he looked exactly like Thomas Carlyle. He had been a blacksmith and wagon-maker long ago, but he had had the prescience to foresee the coming of petrol, and he had turned his shop into a garage and had gone into the repair business, the used car business, new cars and supplies. He had had the right tip and must have got moderately rich. But he was not above demonstrating a car himself, nor even of serving out petrol or doing an odd mechanical job when things were rushed.

‘Here are some other nice light cars with abundance of service in them. You’d like this Chevvy, or here’s a real good Overland . . .’

The great array of silent monsters stood in a row down each side of the shed, with noses obliquely out. The file of dead head-lamps shone dully like blinded eyes, and the air was full of the smell of petrol and rubber and steel and oil. Derrock walked down the aisle, looking at the cars, and when his eyes fell on one car he stopped, startled.

It was a long bullet-like car painted dark grey, with a narrow red stripe. It was not a saloon. It had only a little cockpit in the middle, shielded by a low glass screen, with just room for two people, as if the human element were almost unnecessary and negligible; and it looked powerful, rakish and deadly.

‘If you’d prefer a medium-heavy car, here’s a nice Essex, or here’s a Dodge coop that I’d recommend . . .’

‘What’s this car?’

‘That’s a Jupiter eight, sports model. But she wouldna suit you at all. If you’d just look over this Dodge . . .’

Derrock continued to stare at the long black and grey car with a creeping sort of thrill. He stood in front of it, and he knew that he had faced it before. At any rate, it was the exact double of the car that had charged down Bay Street, knocking him over and nearly scattering his brains. He looked at the license number—xz33. He never could forget that inscription. It seemed improbable, but this was certainly the same car.

‘Have you had this car long? Who owned it before?’

Mr. McMurrich was unwilling to remember.

‘It’s not been here long. We’ve been painting her. New fenders and new radiator too, and some fresh chromium.’

‘Been in a smash, has she?’

‘Sporty cars are always getting smashed, Mr. Derrock.’

‘What’s its price?’

‘Fifteen hundred. I might take twelve hundred cash. She cost close to four thousand. But you wouldn’t want that car.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because she’s not your sort of car, not at all. You don’t want to speed and you want comfort, and this car’s built for nothing but speed. For business use all the year round in this climate, you need a closed car. Now

you're a professional man, trading mostly among the wealthy classes, I take it, a decorative artist, something like a doctor. You want a good, snappy, small car, good enough to look prosperous, not to look sporty or eccentric. You'll not wish to look like a bookmaker driving to the races with a punk.'

'I shouldn't mind,' Derrock said.

Angus gazed at him with calm disapproval.

'The proper harmonization of a man's car to his mode of life is not yet rightly understood,' he went on, looking even more philosophic than Carlyle. 'And yet his car is more important than his house, for it goes about with him, like his clothes. And it is even more important than his clothes, as you might say. For often you do not see the man nor his clothes at all, but there his car stands parked in the public eye. Even when he is in it you see no more of him than his head, and nobody looks at the man anyway, but only at the car. Many a man has been made or destroyed by his taste in cars. It does not look well for a bank cashier to drive an orange racer. Nor for a bank president to drive a Ford. You suspect that he is either a miser or else that he is trying to put something over on the public. Now here's a real good buy—this Buick coop in dark blue, all reconditioned and new tyres. Black or dark blue are the colours for a professional man's car. Colours are verra important. I'm told that in Paris the smart women have their cars repainted several times a year according to the seasons—red or green or grey. I would say they might be going ower far, but they have the right philosophy of it. A man's character can be judged by his car and the way he drives it, and it is mainly through his car that any man can express his personality in these days.'

'But what about the people who have no cars?'

'There are no such people,' Angus affirmed superbly.

It was true! Derrock at once perceived the implications of that superb affirmation. All things existed solely by virtue of their motion. Matter itself was but a matter of speeding atoms; the universe would vanish utterly if it ceased to speed. Speed was the visible garment of reality, and people who couldn't speed up didn't exist.

Leaning against the Buick coop and enunciating the Clothes-Philosophy of motors, Mr. McMurrich looked more than ever like the Whistler portrait. It was a philosophy that could be carried a great deal farther than Teufelsdröckh ever dreamed, who knew nothing of electrons or the velocity of light . . . *In this one pregnant subject of Motors, rightly understood, is*

included all that men have thought, dreamed, done and been. The whole universal Universe and what it holds is but a Motor, and the essence of all Science lies in the Philosophy of Motors. Sartor Resartus—the Chauffeur Rechauffé.

‘But I’m no longer a decorative artist, Mr. McMurrich. I’m writing novels now, and playing the stock market.’

Angus gesticulated quickly toward the new shining cars at the show window.

‘Then what you’ll want is certainly a good high-grade new car, a car that you can sell any time and get two-thirds of your money back. A used car is no good for that, not to raise money on in a hurry.’

But Derrock still hung fascinated beside the torpedo destroyer. The most enormous improbabilities had brought that car back to him again, and there seemed a manifest destiny in it.

‘This car looks quite new. How old is it?’

‘She’s not so new. A ’34 model, but she’s just out of the beauty parlour and all dolled up with new duco.’

‘I’d like to have her demonstrated.’

‘Aweel . . . if you maun have it so,’ said Angus reluctantly. He sighed, and then shouted loudly. ‘One of the boys will be here directly. Take this car out and demonstrate it for Mr. Derrock,’ he said to the mechanic. ‘If you want to see me about it afterwards, Mr. Derrock, you’ll find me in the office.’

And he went away, with the whole of *Past and Present* written on his face.

‘What do you think of her?’

‘She’s all right,’ the wiry, oily, blackened youth answered, exuding the superiority of exact science at every pore.

‘Can she go?’

‘She’ll go all right if you give her the gas.’ He looked at Derrock with a superior, cynical smile, lifted the hood and glanced critically at the tangle of coils, wiring, tubing. He touched one; he shifted another slightly. ‘She’s a powerful speedy old bus. She’ll make close to a hundred if you put her to it. What car have you been used to?’

‘None,’ said Derrock firmly. Facing the grey racer he would not confess that most of his experience had been with a Model T.

‘Well, if you’re not used to driving, I don’t know that I’d just recommend this car. Maybe one of those light cars, maybe a little Ford coop . . .’

Derrock gave him a package of expensive English cigarettes. The mechanic exhibited no gratitude, but became somewhat less contemptuous. He could not imagine what Derrock wanted with the Jupiter.

‘Has the engine been overhauled?’

‘I don’t know. I didn’t see it done. They’ve put on new tyres and new fenders.’

‘She was in a smash.’

‘Yes . . . a smash,’ said the mechanic with a quick glance aside at his customer.

‘Let’s try her out.’

They got into the car and started the engine. The door on the driving side did not latch securely, but that could be easily remedied. The Jupiter rolled out into the street, through the great doors. They went slowly across to Bay Street, and up to St. Clair.

The big car went with a smooth powerful hum, very different from the now quite unmentionable machine that Derrock had used to drive. There was too much traffic for any speed, and the driver was naturally unwilling to risk a fine. But he became more affable as they drove westwards, and he confided to Derrock that this was a damn good car but it had been used rather rough.

‘You know, this car killed a man.’

‘A collision?’

‘Yes. Somewhere near Montreal. The driver of this one wasn’t hurt. He’s in jail now. That’s how his car was turned in for sale.’

Derrock didn’t ask his name. He wasn’t surprised at the information. That driver was certain to land either in jail or in the cemetery. It gave the Jupiter an additional and grim fascination. There was a superstition about man-killing cars; they never stopped with one victim.

Getting out of the traffic, the driver accelerated a little, up to forty or fifty in short stretches, and tried the car on some stiff hills. The engine did not seem to pull on the ascent as it should. It needed tuning up a little, and maybe a new sparking-plug or two, the driver thought. He would see to the tuning-up himself, he promised, if Derrock bought the car. It turned out that he was Angus McMurrich's son.

They were out almost an hour, but Derrock had really made up his mind before they left the garage, and hardly anything short of an absolute breakdown on the street would have changed it. He would have that car, or none. He stopped at the office when they got back. He beat Angus down to \$1100 for cash, and he wrote the cheque, leaving the car for a day or two to be tuned up.

He had a garage waiting for it. This essential had been in his mind all the while he was searching for new quarters. The atelier down town was no longer his, though it still bore a perversion of his name, and his stenographer Florence was still there with the new decorator. A new decorative artist had taken over his furniture, his work in hand, his borrowed pictures and rugs. Derrock had Mr. Leviticus's cheque. He had the cheque for his profits on Infernal Coke, and the cheque had duly come from Chicago for *The Devil Deals*. Banking all these cheques, Derrock had sought out a new place to live in, to work in, to lead the new life.

He found it far up-town, on the hill. It was a small apartment of bedroom, sitting-room, bath, and a tiny kitchenette, where he could make his morning coffee if he liked, or his midnight coffee if he should choose to work on the Balzacian plan. He took it furnished, with service, but he brought up his own personal possessions from the atelier—his typewriter, his radio, his books; and he put in a large flat-topped desk, and bought a thousand sheets of the best typewriter paper.

Here he tried to think about the new melodramatic novel he was going to write for *Danger*—for \$5000. He had already planned the first chapters, in a Chicago atmosphere of unlimited money, great gamblers, night clubs, gangsters, the flash life. A swell night club was held up by four polite, masked men. Instead of plundering the patrons, the bandits took all their finger-prints. Examining the prints of a certain man, they immediately shot him dead. They failed, however, to secure the talisman he carried, which the hero afterward picked up in a pool of blood—a small bar of unknown metal, apparently engraved with algebraic symbols.

This, of course, was the clue to the treasure. Derrock had to resort to the rather hackneyed theme of a buried treasure. For, since art and thought and sex were debarred topics, he could not think of any other mainspring for his story but money. But this was going to be a treasure unlike any other.

More than his story, he thought about the stock market. He had not attempted to play it since his great day on Infernal Coke, but he read the financial pages with intense care, and sometimes talked with Danforth in the brokerage office. He knew well that it was vain to hope for another killing like the last, unless he got another hot tip, and it was not likely that Lola would have another for him. He hadn't seen Lola since she disappeared up in the elevator, pointing him upwards. He ought to go to see her, to thank her. It had been on his conscience; but he delayed, somehow reluctant. He did not feel that Lola would be good for him.

But even if he made no killing, it was possible to win something. Everybody agreed that you could beat the market if you worked hard at it. If you watched the market and studied the chart, and kept track of the long buying and the short selling of any particular stock, and took account of the general business situation, and domestic and foreign affairs, and carried five hundred well-margined shares to work with, you could make four thousand dollars a year, as safe as the bank. Even Lloyd admitted that it could be done, without concealing his contempt for such a pitiful sort of speculation. What was four thousand dollars?

Of course it wasn't much, but Derrock felt that it was an income that he could have whenever he chose to put his mind to it. But for two or three weeks he did hardly anything but play with his car.

It had been tuned up and adjusted—everything tightened up, the mechanic said. The loose door-latch had been still overlooked, but that could be put right in five minutes. Young McMurrich gave him a lesson in the peculiarities of the Jupiter engine, and instructed him in the use of the numerous strange gadgets, and left him to master the rest himself. But Derrock had once been a good Ford driver, and had since occasionally handled other cars belonging to his friends, and he found no particular difficulty with the big machine. He went out every day and practised, on a quiet stretch of road well outside the city.

He conceived an enormous affection for the man-killing car, a respectful affection, not untinged with awe. The car looked so big, so deadly, as it stood in his garage; and once it had nearly had his life. For some time he felt nervously timid about starting it. But at the pressure of the starter pedal it

came obediently to life. The engine roared as he gave it gas, and it moved to his will, rolling backward out of its stall upon the pavement. It went ahead, a little noisily on low gear, purring up powerfully into high, obedient to his least touch, and he grew to love it as you might love a tamed demon. He wiped it down every day, brushing every fleck of dust from the enamel, polishing it with wet chamois and dry cloth, and when he was caught in a shower he hurried it home to its garage lest it should get wet or muddy.

It was a good car, so far as he could see, and Angus McMurrich had dealt fairly with him. He grew accustomed to driving through traffic. He went down through the crowded streets just to try his nerve; but he did most of his driving out of town, on the motor highways or the quiet roads. He liked to cruise slowly around the side-roads, through landscapes that were strange to him coming into unexpected villages. Then he went back to the paved road and speeded up a little. She would go if you gave her the gas, and he pressed the accelerator down a little more every day, going daily a little faster. Forty—forty-five—fifty—that was as fast as he cared to drive her as yet; but he looked confidently forward to the day when the speedometer ribbon would roll around to 100.

He did not care where he went; he had no objective for any of his driving, but he grew tired at last of landscapes that were all the same, and towns and villages that were all alike. Merely to have somewhere to go, he started to drive to Old Lowlands, to see Jerry Mertens, the bee-keeper, whom Edgar Lloyd despised. It took several hours' driving, and his still unaccustomed fingers were cramped and stiff on the wheel before he got there.

He had visited Jerry Mertens before, but he had always gone by train. Now he left the highway at Lowlands Station, passed through the prim and trim little town, with its banks and picture theatres, and turned down the gravel side-road to Old Lowlands.

The old village was no more than a cross-road settlement now, killed by the railroad and the motor highway a few miles north of it. The old houses slept in silence and warm sunlight. A single motor stood in front of the filling station; two old men sat on a bench in front of the post office store. Jerry's house stood where the farm fields began to encroach on the village. It was a grey rough-cast cottage with a lawn at one side, yellow with dandelions and much in need of mowing. Behind the house a high fence, covered heavily with grape-vines, cut off the rear half of the yard.

The front door was open, and Derrock knocked. Nobody answered, and he went in. No one was in the large room, sitting-room, work-room, atelier. The big coal stove was cold; there was a great deal of dust. The walls were covered with mostly unframed sketches in oil; a long bookcase was full of dusty books. One end of the room was blockaded by an immense trestle table, with a typewriter on it and a litter of dusty papers, letters, newspapers. A sheet half-written was in the machine.

‘The age of the queen is perhaps more important than her breeding. Carniolan colonies having a queen less than a year old stored an average of 117 lbs. of honey, as compared with . . .’

He went through the kitchen to the back door and looked out, but still did not see Jerry. There was a small veranda around the back door, a small garden below it, and hollyhocks and sunflowers and peonies were sprouting strongly in thickets all about the rear of the house. Jerry liked forms of beauty that were strong enough to stand by themselves, that didn’t have to be weeded, that could kill their own weeds.

A board walk led to a small gate in the grape-vine fence. Derrock opened the gate, and looked into the home apiary, a space of some hundred feet square, full of apple trees, and white bee-hives under the trees. The air was roaring with wings. At the farthest end he saw Jerry, dressed in white duck, his sleeves rolled up, a gauze veil over his head, operating some instrument that puffed volumes of smoke into an open hive. Derrock was afraid to venture into that danger area, but he shouted, and Jerry looked back, closed the hive, and approached, looking very brown and rural and a little awkward.

‘Hello Rock! How on earth did you get here? There’s no train at this time of day. Come inside and have some honey.’

Jerry always offered you honey. He ate it himself at all hours, for breakfast, for supper, in the middle of the night. He even drank it, for he had discovered an ancient English recipe for making mead, or hydromel, and he brewed quantities of it every summer, bottling it and wiring down the corks. When it was opened next year the liquor came out pale amber, frothing like champagne, with an aroma of blossoms and fifteen per cent of alcohol—not a drink to be despised.

Jerry produced a plate of gold-coloured honey-comb and a loaf of bread, and brought up a bottle of hydromel from his cellar. The clear liquor bubbled out, smelling like midsummer, and he filled two tumblers. Derrock

drank and waited, not surprised by Jerry's silence. From living so many years almost entirely alone in the country he had grown shy and crusted with cloddishness, so that he was unable to talk normally until he had had at least two drinks.

'What are you doing now, Jerry? Are you merely producing honey, are you writing anything?'

'No, I gave up writing long ago. I can't write,' Jerry answered. He poured another drink, swallowed half of it, and began to be more at his ease. 'Well, I'm writing an article for a bee-journal on queen-breeding. I rear quite a lot of queens, you know—not for sale, just for my own yards. Yes, and I'm thinking of writing an article on Canadian literature. Carlton Maitland wants it for his department in his paper, for Canadian Book Week. Shall I read you what I've written?'

'No,' said Derrock.

Jerry refilled their tumblers with the foaming drink that smelt like fields of clover, and brought up another bottle. Sipping it, his shyness fell away from him in flakes.

'Everybody is urged to buy, or at least to read, one Canadian book during the Book Week. But nobody ever does, neither in that nor in any other week.'

'Why not?' Derrock asked. 'For it is a notorious fact that our writers are much superior to the Americans. In fact, we are known to have the best Canadian writers in the world.'

'Of course. It's an article of faith. Our writers of detective tales and animal stories . . .'

He chanced to look out the window at this moment, and saw the Jupiter for the first time.

'Great Heavens! Is the devil-wagon yours? Where did you get it?'

'That's nothing. I've sold my decorating business, and made a fortune on the stock market.'

'Who gave you a tip?'

'Tips are easy to come by. You have to pick out the right ones from the wrong ones, though. You have to understand the game. But that's nothing. I am about to become a successful novelist. I've just sold one to *Danger*.'

Jerry, who drove two cars and a lorry, all rather old, went out to look at the Jupiter. He examined it all over with the greatest appreciation, while Derrock described his novel, its success, and the new one he was preparing. Jerry didn't seem much impressed.

'I've written barrels of that tripe in my time,' he commented coldly, trying the Jupiter's gear-change.

'Did you ever get \$5000 for a single story?'

'No, prices weren't as high as that in my time.'

'Nor the stories as good. I have the punch. I expect to make at least \$10,000 a year out of it.'

'I've no doubt you will. I can tell you exactly how to do it. The secret is in quantity production. Writing the stuff is nothing—mere manual labour. Making up the plots is the trouble. Then you must keep three stories going at once—one that you're just thinking about, one where you're blocking out the chapters, and one that you're actually writing. All the forenoon you should think without writing anything, and all the afternoon you should write without thinking anything. Working five days a week, you should turn out six or eight full-length novels. Yes, you should make \$10,000 a year, or even more.'

'Why don't you do it yourself?'

'I used to—at least, I made a living at it. But I never grasped the secret of quantity production. Then a professional serial-writer in New York explained the technique of the thing to me, just as I've done to you. It appalled me, and I came to the country and took to keeping bees. Besides, I never could stand the sight of my stories when I saw them in print . . .'

'Ah, you have too much bloody good taste,' Derrock murmured, but even he felt a trifle appalled.

Jerry drove him around to visit the different bee-yards, four or five of them—Derrock lost count. They seemed all much alike, great assemblages of white hives placed in some nook of the woods. Jerry furnished him with a gauze veil to go over his hat, and they went into the yards, where the bees were flying actively. To Derrock's surprise, none of them even tried to sting him. He did not need the veil. They were too busy gathering dandelion honey, Jerry explained, and would not think of stinging. It was when honey was scarce that they grew bad-tempered.

He saw a hive opened and taken to pieces, all its combs spread out. He understood nothing of it. He had only a dazed impression of masses of crawling insects over the brown honey-combs. Jerry told him that he knew the exact interior condition of every one of these hives, approximately how many bees they had, the age of the queen, the amount of honey they had in store, and the amount they were likely to gather. He kept all this in his memory. He said he had to. It sounded incredible, and Derrock thought that writing novels was nothing to this.

He stayed the night with Jerry, and they sat up till nearly dawn, drinking the honey liquor and talking of T. S. Eliot and Swinburne, of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, all of whom Jerry impartially admired. In the morning Derrock drove the Jupiter back to Toronto.

After that comparatively long run he felt capable of going anywhere, but he could not think of any place where he wanted to go. For hundreds of miles everything was alike, unless he went due north, into the wild country. He drove to Montreal, and had nothing to do when he got there except to come back again; which he did. He wanted to take Erma out in his car. She liked fast motoring; he would show her some speed. But she was always out; or else she wouldn't let him in, for nobody ever answered when he knocked at her black-painted door.

The harsh northern spring was warming up into summer, and the long paved highways were bright in the sun, belted with a strip of yellow dandelions on either side. Purring like a tamed demon, the Jupiter ate up the miles. A small black dog ran out from the dandelions, waving its tail and barking ecstatically. It vanished as if it had been sucked under the wheels. He felt no shock; he did not think he had struck it, but he slowed and looked behind. Back on the roadway he saw a small black object squirming, dragging itself away.

He stopped and ran back. The little dog had been run over the body, but it was not dead, and kept dragging itself feebly toward the edge of the road, leaving a trail of blood and bowel-contents on the asphalt. It recognized its enemy, and growled at Derrock when he bent over it. In panic and horror Derrock looked about for some weapon, a stone or a club. He could find nothing, and he ran to the car and got a steel machine hammer from the toolbox, and killed it. There was no house anywhere near, and he could not tell where the dog had come from. He left it lying in the weeds by the road, and drove on, feeling that he would never want to drive that way again.

He felt sick and unnerved, and his hands trembled on the wheel. He drove much more slowly, and then a little faster, recovering himself. He came to Georgetown, and turned around and went back. On the bad hills at Norval the engine flagged; it was not pulling right. It needed to have the valves ground or the carburettor adjusted—he didn't know what. But it was all right on the level. He came home pretty fast, and he went past the place where he had killed the dog, and did not once think of it. Reaching the city limit, he found that he had done the forty miles in fifty-five minutes. It was not so bad, but he did not believe that the car would ever do even ninety until the engine had been overhauled.

On Bloor Street he saw a large maroon saloon in front of him that he thought he recognized, and it gave him great pleasure to pass it. A side-glance as he went by showed Wallie Weatherford at the wheel, and he was alone in the car. It reminded Derrock that he had not yet called to take tea with Lola Matanzas, and to thank her for her tip. He certainly owed her that, at the least. But he shrank from going. He was afraid of Lola just as he had once been afraid of his car. He intended to go, but really he would rather have left her alone.

Restoring the Jupiter to its garage, he went up to his rooms, firmly intending to put in a couple of hours on his new story. But he was over-stimulated now with speed and fresh air, and he felt like anything rather than constructing a plot. He lighted his pipe and turned on the radio—he could think better to music. He got a number of advertising talks, and then, shifting the dial, a jazz fox-trot started with a rattle and a roar. Out of the exciting scrimmage a plaintive voice crooned;

Please make me happy
And put me wise.

That was the sort of thing he wanted. Round and round the fox-trot roared and spun, a crashing pattern of dancing question and elusive answer.

Where'd you get those lips?
Where'd you get those eyes?
How'd you grow so sweet?
How'd you grow so nice?
O Honey . . .

The kick-kick of the fast music with its flashing syncopated phrases beat with the precision of the spark and explosion in a speeding engine.

Please make me happy,
And put me wise.

A work of great genius, Derrock thought, for it summed up the whole cry of the world. All of philosophy, all of art, all of religion was in that syncopated request. But it got no answer; for the Universe is a Motor, and in its complicated crankcase there is no place for either happiness nor wisdom.

He felt less than ever like working on his plot, and he took a tramcar down to the centre of the city. He thought he would like to see Edgar Lloyd. He felt like listening to Lloyd's talk, whether about the market or about modern French poetry. But Lloyd was not at the *Express* office, and he called at several brokerage places without finding him. He tried Erma's door again, but she was out, or else she would not answer. It was Saturday, and there was a matinee at Lola's theatre; but it was late by this time, and Lola would certainly be back at the hotel. He felt that there was a destiny about it, and he bought five dollars worth of flowers, and went to the Imperial Royal Hotel.

At the desk they told him that she was in, and telephoned his name up. Lola herself opened the door to him. She was all alone, and rather in *déshabillé*. Her thick hair was plaited on her shoulders, and she was wearing a clinging silk dressing-gown of dark pink, with Chinese patterns all over it in gold that looked like exploding fireworks. She stared at him as if she hardly knew him; but she took the flowers, and sat back on the divan, a huge affair, as big as a double bed, heaped with gay cushions.

'How'd you know I wasn't playing this week?'

'Aren't you?' said Derrock. 'I didn't know. I came up on the chance. I've meant to come to see you long ago, but I've been retiring from business, and moving, and out of town, and frightfully busy.'

'No, there wasn't any good part for me in the show this week. I wanted a week off anyway. Will you have tea? Cigarettes there on the box beside you. Wallie went to Chicago last night for a couple of days.'

Derrock didn't think it necessary to tell her that he had seen Wallie on Bloor Street that afternoon. No doubt the broker had his own reasons for telling Lola where he wasn't going.

'I didn't come to see Wallie, but you.'

Lola turned to the electric plate where a brass kettle was already steaming, and made the tea. There were plates of a dozen sorts of different little cakes on a side table.

‘Do you take lemon?’ she asked primly. ‘This is China tea. I don’t drink no other kind. Didn’t I see you driving yesterday? Some car you’ve got.’

‘I came to thank you for it. I certainly owe it to you.’

She looked at him dully, with an almost brutally stupid face, then opened a sideboard and took out a bottle of Scotch.

‘Maybe you don’t care for tea. Maybe you’d rather have a shot of this.’

‘Will you have a shot too?’

‘No, I hardly ever touch it. I’d like to, but I durstn’t. I got too much temperament as it is.’ She looked powerfully, darkly at him. ‘Besides, if I was to hit the booze the least bit I’d get to look coarse.’

‘I’m sure you never could,’ Derrock murmured, declining the whisky, and drinking the tea, which was excellent.

‘What d’you mean—owe that car to me?’

‘Why, it was your tip, you know, on Infernal Coke. I won several thousands on it the next day.’

‘What d’you mean—tip? I didn’t know anything about Coke, and neither did Wallie.’

‘You certainly gave me the tip, Lola. Don’t you remember? Lloyd and I were asking you whether it was to be up or down, and then you told me “up”, and you pointed up, like this. And you said “make it to-night”. So I put up my bet that very night.’

‘“To-night,”’ said Lola, and it seemed that a sort of flush really arose on her cheeks. ‘Up? Yes, I believe I did say that. But you didn’t play that for a tip, did you?’

‘Certainly I did.’

Lola stared at him and then began to laugh, huskily and harshly. She laughed excessively, throwing her head back against the cushions.

‘Gosh, I never meant any such thing. I only meant that I’d like you to come up, up, you know, up to this floor. I don’t know what I meant by “to-night”. And you beat the market on it! Talk about luck!’

She laughed loudly again, but Derrock couldn’t laugh. He could produce no more than a pale smile. It turned him cold to think how close to ruin he had skated. He had gambled almost all he owned on Lola’s up-pointing finger, on the tip that wasn’t a tip.’

‘Anyhow,’ he contrived to say, ‘you made the money for me.’

‘I’m glad I did. I’m awfully glad you hit it. It’ll be a joke on Wallie. He played Coke the other way and dropped about ten thousand. He’d be wild if I told him that I had a tip, but I’m awfully glad that you made a killing on my tip.’

Really, she would soon think that she had actually given him the tip. She stopped laughing, and looked at him with big heavy eyes, and Derrock thought he detected a faint rising gleam in their dark depths. She put her cigarette down abruptly.

‘Come over here and sit by me.’

Derrock moved over to the huge divan, that felt soft as a feather-bed, and was big enough for several persons to sleep on at once. He sat close to her. He slipped an arm around her waist. It felt as if she had nothing on beneath the fireworks gown. She looked into his face, and her eyes seemed big enough to drown a man. She put both arms around his neck with a powerful compression, and drew his mouth against hers. In the very middle of that combustible moment the telephone bell buzzed harshly, like the voice of a moralist.

Without letting him go, Lola turned her face aside and listened, as if she hoped it wouldn’t ring again. But it did.

‘Oh hell!’ she muttered, but she got up and went to the instrument.

‘Hello—Hello! Oh, is that you, dearest? You’re downstairs? All right, come right up. Sure, I was expecting you. Certainly, bring them along, the more the better.’

She hung up the receiver, and turned back to Derrock.

‘It’s some boys and girls from the Follies company at the Grand. They’re downstairs. I’d asked them to come in this afternoon, but I’d clean forgot it. I can’t turn them down now. Stay and meet them.’

‘No, I think I won’t.’

‘They’re a nice bunch. You’d better stay.’

But Derrock didn’t want to meet the bunch.

‘No, I won’t stay. But I’ll come back again.’

‘Yes, come back.’ She looked at him reflectively, with a deep smoulder in her eyes. ‘They’ll be gone before seven o’clock. Come back at seven.’

Don't send up your name. Just come right up. I'll be expecting you.'

At seven o'clock Derrock went right up.

CHAPTER IV

Derrock had hardly expected to leave the hotel before the next forenoon; but he came out before two in the morning, humiliated, shredded up, drained of spirit. He had been discarded, practically thrown out, like a dead horse, like an empty bottle; but he positively couldn't have kept awake any longer. The hotel lobby was still full of people and he went out the side entrance to avoid them; but he thought the elevator man cast a derisive glance after him as he left the gilded cage.

The night tramcars were running empty. He found himself at home in his rooms. The furnishings of his apartment looked sinister and unnatural. He thought vaguely of hot milk; he certainly needed something; but he longed above all for sleep, and he went to bed at once. He fell asleep as if he had been drugged; he slept as if he were dead. He awoke as if he had been stabbed. He was broad awake, feeling that he had slept for hours. But the radiant dial of his clock told him that he had slept less than forty minutes.

His heart pounded unevenly; all his nerves jumped; he couldn't lie still another second. He got up and turned on all the lights. The room seemed cold and strange and dangerous. He felt sick, full of pain, a nightmare sort of pain, not exactly a physical pain, though he had an atrocious ache in the small of his back. His whole nervous system felt unprotected and laid bare, and his mind was all twisted out of shape. He felt as if he had been skinned alive—not physically, of course, and certainly not spiritually—astrally, perhaps. That was it! His astral body had been skinned alive.

He couldn't think of going back to bed. He had slipped on a dressing-gown, but he took it off and put on all his clothes. He felt more protected so. He went into his sitting-room, and turned on all the lights. He glanced at the notes for his story on the table, and it made him sick to think of it. He looked at his books, but he couldn't read; at his radio, but he couldn't stand music, even if there were any at that hour. He thought of a drink. Half a tumbler of straight whisky might stun him into sleep, but he was afraid of what dreams might come. His mind seemed to spin out of control. Everything he had ever done in his whole life came back to him, especially the unpleasant and humiliating things, and they all hurt him and made him sick. Vividly and unwillingly he thought of the little black dog he had killed, and that hurt him worse than anything; but the world was full of things like that. The newspapers advertised nothing else. Hundreds of men and women

had met violent deaths yesterday, quite unnecessarily, merely for the satisfaction of somebody else, or maybe out of pure inattention, and most people found their chief pleasure in hearing or reading about these events. Such things might be reprobated by some persons, but to a natural mind they must seem perfectly natural, since until recently human life has always been organized on a basis of cruelty and destruction, and, except for a negligible minority of people, is still so organized.

That indeed was the right way to get back to Nature, to the truly simple life. Nature red in tooth and claw was a Victorian phrase, but they didn't know the half of it, till the theory of improvement by means of cruelty and destruction was turned on the world by a mild English recluse. But now we had grown accustomed to the idea of growth in grace by a process of throat-slitting. To our imperfect minds it might seem revolting, but it must seem perfectly natural to the Supreme Mind which has organized the universe on a basis of destruction and cruelty.

Meanwhile the cry arose from a million talking-machines:

Please make us happy,
And put us wise.

There was some cold coffee in the pot in his kitchenette, and he heated it up and drank it, black, boiling and strong as lye. It seemed to ease his pain a little, but his mind spun faster and more irresponsibly than ever. He put his head out the open window. It was a warm, still night, and the electric glow lighted perfectly deserted streets. From his window on the hill he could see a long way over the lighted city, all asleep now, for there were no night clubs in Toronto. It would be a long time before the streets woke up. Here and there he distinguished the crawl of tramcars, like illuminated beetles. Far away, a train crept along the lake front, like an illuminated caterpillar. Looking in another direction he could also see for a considerable distance—for several thousands of light-years, in fact. Up there, in the cold of absolute zero, time and space were all distorted, pulled all askew, the astrophysicists said; and star-clusters fell through it for ever, falling from nowhere to nowhere, cutting corners of space and time. Up there God moved in mysterious ways, pulling space and time askew.

Throughout eternity—whatever that meant, if it meant anything—God had worked thus in His universe, building up its incredible complexity by a process of cruelty and destruction. He worked in mysterious ways, but now He was beginning to be found out. Science was beginning to see through Him. And at last He had somewhat over-reached Himself. For in man He

had produced something new, something Promethean, that judged its Creator, that refused to accept cruelty and destruction, that cried into the interstellar spaces more and more insistently, demanding to be made happy, or at any rate to be put wise.

And here was the wonder! Something did hear sometimes, and sometimes something answered.

All the valuable experience of man lay in that fact, all his art, all his religion. Something could hear the human cry, and sometimes something answered it, though some said it was a god, and some said it was a devil, and some said it was a spirit of the dead. And some said it was the god in our own unconscious minds. But anyhow it was not the God of the absolute zero and the gravitational fields of force.

But why should there be only one sort of god, Derrock wondered. Why this mania for reducing everything to unity, as if one were any more respectable than ten. Surely man was not the only intelligence that the tortured time-space dimension had been able to bring forth. It might be so, but the probabilities seemed against it. It was like saying that God had been to Judaea and nowhere else. On the face of it, nothing would seem more likely than that there were many other intelligences, invisible to us, but inhabiting the same universe, existing under other conditions, but in the same world, wiser and perhaps happier. We could hardly know them, except in those dark subconscious echoes through which they spoke, but they knew us. Indeed, all the traditions of man testified to it. Man had always found himself in touch with gods or devils or the spirits of the dead. In one shape or another, under one name or another, the gods had always been there, interested in man. Sometimes, indeed, they had carried their interest so far as to come over visibly upon his plane, to try to put him wise. But generally with very slight success.

How jolly if it should turn out that the Greeks had been right all along after all, instead of the Jews! Derrock thought, considerably cheered. For it occurred to him that he had hit upon the exact classic theology—a dark Creator-Fatality, quite unknowable, and then the gods, creators in a small way themselves, perhaps, remote cousins of man, durable but not quite eternal, interested in man, hearing him and sometimes speaking in answer.

He looked out into the darkness over the lighted city. Perhaps he had rediscovered the secret of the universe. It would be a long time yet before the city awakened. There was plenty of time yet to go to bed, but still knew that he couldn't sleep, and didn't want to sleep if he could. He thought of

taking out the car, driving somewhere far out of the city to wait for sunrise. Speed was the thing to wash the poisons out of the brain!

It was just what he wanted. In an hour or two he would probably be hungry, and he looked in his kitchenette, but could find nothing but a half-bottle of milk and two bananas. These he put in his pockets. Going quietly down the stairs, he thought that there wasn't much point, after all, in comprehending the secret of the universe. Unless we were immortal, or at any rate durable, surviving the present death, there wasn't much point to anything. For life was far too short to make much use of anything you learned in it. Unless you could take a longer view than a lifetime you might as well acquiesce in all the cruelty and destruction, since it was so transitory as to be negligible. That was what the Stoic Emperor had thought, he who had said that life might be lived well, even in Toronto. He didn't believe in the gods.

He backed the Jupiter out of its garage, and drove quietly through the empty streets, in the wasteful electric glare that lighted nobody but himself. Stray cats walked the pavement with assurance, but nothing else moved. Yet it was growing near daybreak, though the sky was still starry and blue-black. The dense line of house-fronts grew broken, spaced by gardens, fields, wide patches of darkness. Outside the city he turned away from the paved highway, into a country road that wound up among the hills. It was still perfectly dark. The road, the trees, the fences flashed out brilliantly in the head-lamps, and vanished; but he grew conscious of something changing in the air. After a few miles more, he halted, stopped the engine, and turned out his lights.

The stars had all gone. The sky was an opaque and slaty grey, and it was no longer night, though it was not yet morning. There was transparency in the east, and a great tangle of inky-purple clouds lay against it like a hieroglyph. Cold, cold the hills rose around him, vast shapes swelling out of the blur, and cold and dark the earth was reshaping herself out of the mystery of night. Not the chirp of a bird, not a whisper, not a breath of wind, only that grey silent growing out of the formless darkness. Surely this was the hour, if ever, when a god might speak. Derrock leaned on the wheel, with all his sore spirit strained to listen . . . There was no answer only that cold unfolding, and that wild scribble of purplish cloud across the eastern sky, changing now, colouring, reddening.

Every moment the air grew greyer and thinner, and when he drove on he no longer needed his lights. From the crest of a hill he came in sight of the distant city beside the lake, a glow of light and a glare against the sky. And

while he looked it died, it was blown out. Instead of the glow, there was nothing but a wide brown blur of roofs, rising towers, and a little drift of smoke.

He pressed down hard on the accelerator. Speed was the thing to wash the poisons out of the brain. For the Universe is a Motor, and it is in high speed that human power doth show likest God's. The road was not paved, but it was a good road, a hard gravel road, and nothing moved on it but himself. A gleam of light was shooting up in the east; the sun would be up in a minute. Fifty miles, said the dashboard ribbon—fifty-five—sixty—a little more gas! He was making well over a mile a minute, the road flowing under him like a grey ribbon, the engine purring like a happy released demon. It was reckless speed for that sort of road. A burst tyre, a spot of soft gravel, and he and the Jupiter would go to smash together, to test the theory of survival by the experimental method. The Jupiter was a man-killer and it had nearly had him once, but he did not think it would catch him again—not now, not this morning.

He kept up the speed as long as he dared, but the road grew rougher. After a bad swerve he had to slow down, down to fifty, then to the dead crawl of forty and thirty-five. A little dash of rain spattered on the engine hood and steamed off, and then the sun shone again. He drew up by the road and ate his bananas and drank his milk, greatly refreshed and almost made over. Speed had washed the poisons out of him. His back no longer ached, and he could even think of Lola Matanzas with only a slight shudder. She wasn't a demon to be tamed. At any rate, he wasn't the man to tame her, and he thought of Wallie Weatherford with a great accession of respect.

The road was strange to him. He did not know how far he had come, and had no idea where he was, except that he had been heading in a general way towards the west. He drove slowly on, looking for landmarks, but there were no traffic directions on that country road. Another spatter of rain fell, and again the sun shone out warmly. All the roadside and all the pasture fields were butter-yellow with dandelions, and the air was sweet with the smell of dampened dust. But it was a long time before he came to any spot that he could identify, and then he found that he had come much farther than he had imagined. He was actually not much more than twenty miles from Old Lowlands, by the shortest route, and he decided to go on and breakfast with Jerry Mertens. It would do him good to have another taste of the simple life.

The shortest route proved the slowest, for it took him over a series of dirt roads, bad roads where he had to drive cautiously. On every side the farms were waking up. Smoke was rising, there was a sound of human voices, of

barking dogs, of cattle lowing to be milked. Another dash of rain came warmly, and again the sun came out, and this alternation of sun and shower lasted all the way. But for his increasing feeling of emptiness he would have liked to go on driving, on and on, indefinitely, without getting anywhere; but he was very weary and hungry when he came into the village and stopped at Jerry's gate.

'Good heavens, Rock! How did you get here? Have you been out all night?'

Derrock slipped stiffly from behind the wheel, lurching against the loose door, which flew open.

'I've solved the problem of the universe.'

'You must be tired,' returned Jerry sympathetically, too taken by surprise to be shy. 'Come in and have something to eat. I'm just having breakfast. Have some honey?'

'No, not any sweet stuff. Strong stuff is what I need—ham and eggs and a bottle of your hydromel.'

Jerry cooked more ham and eggs and coffee, and Derrock ate and drank enormously. His nightmares were all gone now. Speed and fresh air and food had washed them all out. Jerry brought up a bottle of hydromel and opened it, fizzing, amber and potent, a far from despicable drink, though hardly the thing for seven o'clock in the morning.

'Have you written your essay on Canadian literature, yet, Jerry?'

'No, I'm not going to write it. The subject is too vast, unless I had access to a large library. Besides, I'm not a writer. I'm a bee-man, and the bees are keeping me busy just now, with all these dandelions in full bloom. Well, I'm writing a sort of novel.'

'What sort of novel? Sex stuff?'

'By no means. Love is no subject for a book, unless you treat it in a purely conventional way, like a medieval romance or a magazine story. For one part of love is so divine and mystical that it can't be expressed in words of any human language; and one part is so human that it can't be described in any words that you could print; and the trifling residue is mostly a matter of economics. No, my novel is all about bee-keeping. Shall I read you some of it?'

'No,' said Derrock.

Serenely Jerry smiled and poured the honey wine. Derrock carried his drink to the little back veranda and smoked in the open air, above the green-growing hollyhocks. Beyond the fence the apple trees were all white and pink, sending out violent gusts of sweetness into the damp air. Intermittent warm splashes of rain fell, and then the sun shone, and there was a roaring from the apiary under the apple trees. Bees were flying out, getting caught in a shower, and having to fly back again. All along the veranda railing bees were alighting for shelter, to dry their wings, combing them out with their legs, and then flying again. The warm air was full of the strong, warm scent of damp earth and fruit-blossoms. Inside the living-room Jerry had put a record on the gramophone, a symphony record, highbrow stuff; and Derrock listened contentedly, smoking his pipe, full of food and drink, and no longer troubled about the mystery of the universe.

But the music was troubled about the mystery of the universe. Something knocked at the door, at the door of the spirit, knocking to get in or to get out, with a demand, a question through the door. A flood of melodies followed in ambiguous answer, and question and answer joined hands and danced ring-around in predestined circles, through pleasures and pains and ecstasies of youth. 'Quiet was better,' said the undertone harmony. 'What is this dance, so fast, so driven? Please put me wise.' Elusive, evasive, the answer slipped away in a dazzle of melodies, went rocking down the chromatic scale, concealed itself in a confusion of beauty. Elusive, laughing, the god slipped away, veiling himself in a cloud of beauty, of pride, of sensuality, of intoxication. Lost in a wilderness of dead pizzicatos, something awoke, something awoke from the intoxication with an imperative demand; and this time it did not wait for any answer from without. It returned the answer to itself in a superb affirmation, in the clangour of a tremendous armed march. It would take the Kingdom of Heaven by force. But the violence failed, the march died, and the Kingdom was not taken after all; and the god stood aloof, laughing ironically. But not yet dissuaded, the question came again; and now, wearied with importunity, the god turned and delivered the final answer—crash! crash! crash! like the blows of a steel hammer. Silence. But it was not yet quite dead, and it managed to raise its head feebly. Please . . . ! But another smash ended it.

'Beethoven meant nothing of the sort,' said Jerry. 'There's no question and no answer. It's just that you don't know anything about music.'

'What do you think of the chances of immortality, Jerry?'

'I think the chance is very poor,' said Jerry promptly, 'at least for any writer I know. I shouldn't count on it, if I were you, not on the strength of

your stories for *Danger*. Now, in *The Queen-Master*. .’

‘What is that?’

‘It’s the novel I’m writing, all about bee-keeping. A queen-master is a man who breeds queen bees. I’ll read you some of it.’

‘No,’ said Derrock.

He was too late. Jerry already had the sheet of manuscript in his hands.

‘I awoke in the midnight, in the amber and silver of the autumn midnight, and remembered the darkness of winter. The air was misty and silver with moonlight, and clouded with the falling of the leaves, falling dense and choking as a mist through the moonlight, all the leaves of Arcady falling upon the valleys of Vallombrosa.

‘They fell in a crimson shivering cloud through the mist of the moonlight; they fell stifling as a cloud, with a rustle and a shudder and a whisper, and the air was full of the shuddering and the falling and the whispering of death . . .’

‘If you can write ten stories a year at \$2000 apiece you’d better go to it, Jerry,’ said Derrock.

‘No, I’d rather keep bees and write this sort of thing. Listen, Rock! I’ve found out something. People talk about the marvellous intelligence of the bee, of the wonderful civilization it has constructed. But all that is the bunk. A bee has no intelligence, it has no civilization, it hasn’t anything. It is a nothing, except as a part of its community. It is a mere mechanism, a mere cell, a bit of muscular tissue attached to the colony. It has no sex, not to amount to anything. In each of those hives out there are some 40,000 insects, most of them practically sexless. To speak with Virgil:

‘neque cubitu indulgent, nec corpora segnes in Venerem solvent . . .’

They neither bed maritally, nor melt themselves down in venery. All these things are done for them, leaving them free to live perfectly natural lives, devoted entirely to working and eating, fighting and dying, which is, after all the most natural sort of life. The queen and the few hundred drones attend to all the sex stuff. They are the reproductive organs of the animal, of the colony, as the workers are the muscular tissue.’

‘And what brain have they, what organs of intelligence?’ Derrock asked idly, not paying much attention to all this.

‘They have none, nor any need for such things,’ Jerry replied firmly. ‘No bee thinks. The whole colony thinks for her, thinks with her. What one knows, they all know. I suppose you’re a communist, Rock. Everybody now seems to be either a communist or a fascist, God knows why. I’m an anarchist myself, a rugged individualist. However, this is the communist ideal, isn’t it—the merging of the individual into the community, body and mind together; and so, they say, the individual is able to reach a higher development than he ever could as an individual. Certainly it is so with the bees. And the mystics tell us that humanity can only get anywhere if it is willing to merge itself into some higher and deeper soul. Our individual efforts are merely diseases, merely cancerous growths on the great body—futile besides, for you cannot really oppose the great trend, you can only cripple yourself by struggling against it. I don’t know. Certainly it is so in the hive. But I don’t like the idea, do you, Rock?’

Pleased and well-fed, Derrock listened idly, not taking it in. He finished his drink, looking at the pink apple branches.

‘Play that symphony over again, Jerry, and let’s have another bottle of your honey wine.’

CHAPTER V

‘How do you like it, Erma?’

Erma looked up and down the great gallery without saying how she liked it. There were many hundreds of pictures there, all in expensive frames, for it was the spring show of the Royal Academy of Canada. There portraits that looked as good as photographs, portraits that didn’t look like anything human, typically Canadian scenes representing small red huts about to be buried under icebergs or mountains of snow. There were even arrangements of blocks and squares and triangles that expressed a philosophy of life, it was understood; for Canada was not going to be in the rear of any new movement.

Derrock remembered an exhibition that he had lately seen in this same gallery, of a few dozen modern Scandinavian examples of modern art—many of them queer geometrical arrangements, and some of them pictures that seemed like kindergarten work till you had looked at them long enough, and then they kept you awake at nights afterwards, thinking about them. They seemed entirely naive, but they concealed a terrible punch. It did not seem to him that these local futurists had the punch, and their air of simplicity was forced and selfconscious. But he didn’t know anything about painting. He would have to ask Erma.

‘What do you think of it, Erma?’

She had walked all around the three great rooms with him, and she glanced back without much appearance of interest.

‘I think it’s all right.’

‘Oh no, Erma, you mustn’t say that. You can’t possibly think it’s all right. At least, I hope not. You might say that it’s grand, or swell or hellish, but you can’t say that it’s all right. This is the great art show of the year.’

‘I know it, Ford. Can’t you shut up about it?’

‘You’re incorrigible, Erma. You’re not at all patriotic. Look, here are more than four hundred pictures, all of them works of great genius. All the artists, except for a few wretched outsiders, have exhibited at the London Academy, the Paris Salon, the Munich what-do-you-call-it, and famous all over the world. If we are not familiar with their names, it is the fault of our ignorance. All the prices of the pictures are plainly marked in the catalogue,

and the aggregate must be nearly a thousand grand. To be sure, nobody seems to be buying these pictures, that I can see, but they remain part of the permanent wealth of the country—what are called frozen assets. And then, think of all the pictures that we do not see! If the hanging committee had wished it, and if the gallery had been large enough, we might have had twice, thrice as many pictures, all as good as these, and in fact, to the ordinary eye, entirely indistinguishable from these. Who can say that Canada is not an artistic country?’

‘I’m sure I never said it, Ford,’ Erma said patiently.

‘Yes, and when you come to think of it,’ Derrock continued, ‘I have no doubt that in any North American city of the size of this you could at short notice get together five hundred pictures just like these, and, in fact, entirely indistinguishable from them, all painted by artists who are famous in London, Paris and Munich. We have never heard of them, but that is our disgrace. Who can say that America is not an artistic place. And this is a quite new phenomenon, for fifty years ago it would have been impossible to get together so much genius anywhere, but now it can be done universally and at any moment. It means something, Erma—the universality of art or the dictatorship of the proletariat—something anyway terribly modern and important.’

‘I suppose so, Ford,’ Erma said patiently.

She wasn’t amused. He had been trying to amuse her, to cheer her up, by showing her the pictures, by giving her a lunch, by his talk, but he hadn’t succeeded very well. He sat silent, trying to think of something amusing to say, while Erma continued to look without interest at the pictured wall. Near the other end of the room, in one of the best spots on the line, hung Wellington London’s portrait of Lola Matanzas. London must have hurried, to be able to finish it in time for this show. Yet, as Derrock had predicted, it was one of his successes. Lola was looking straight out of the canvas, with her celebrated stare. It was just like her; it was as good as a photograph. Perhaps he had not quite rendered the soft, opaque tone of her skin, but he had painted her dress admirably, and her masses of shadowy hair, and her great dark empty eyes, which were so exactly suited to his genius.

‘Do you know her?’ Erma asked.

‘I’ve seen her on the stage, of course. But, do you know, Erma,’ he went on hurriedly, ‘I’m inclined to think that painting pictures is really the lowest form of intellectual effort—if you can even call it intellectual. It’s a kindergarten game, the sort of thing children first attempt and afterwards

grow out of. Photography has painting skinned a mile, for the expert photographer can shade and distort and falsify his subject just as well as any painter. Unless, of course, you paint your abstract ideas, and convey a criticism of life in geometrical symbols. You ought to paint your abstract ideas, Erma.'

But Erma hadn't any abstract ideas. She continued to look indifferently and yet jealously up and down the gallery, and Derrock knew that she was thinking, 'If I could finish my "Chimaera" as I want it, I'd make all these pictures look like counterfeit pennies.'

But the 'Chimaera' was still a long way from being finished, for he had seen it only an hour or two ago, when he called for Erma at the studio. She had been working hard at it, in one of her violent fits, and she had painted in the legs and feet handsomely, with dark, rich flesh tones, and atmosphere all around them. The 'Chimaera' itself remained a blur; she was undecided about it. Ought it to be shaggy or smooth coated, and does a chimaera have a tail? But she had entirely repainted the woman's face.

'Do you think I'm getting it?' she asked him anxiously.

He couldn't honestly say that he did, knowing what she wanted almost as well as she did herself. The drawing, the difficult foreshortening were passable enough, but she had failed to get the necessary expression of ecstasy and torture. It merely looked rather pained, as if the chimaera were biting a little.

'No, you needn't say anything. I know damn well that I haven't got anything like what I want.'

She dropped into her chair, in a sullen huddle, staring at the canvas with a black, baffled, tenacious face.

'But I will get it. I'll get it yet!'

Maybe she would, but he didn't believe it was Erma's job. She might have the big idea, but it was a subject for a Goya, for a Japanese, for one of the daemonic new Slavs, who could paint anything if it were only queer enough. But he didn't believe it was a woman's job.

Then he caught sight of a picture he had never seen before, a small landscape set against the wall. It was just three trees on a bare hillside, under a driving sky, roughly but surely painted, and Derrock had the sudden startled thrill that it takes something very good to give. He got up with an exclamation to look at it closely.

‘Gad, there’s something bully! When did you do this?’

‘The other day, taking a rest from the “Chimaera”. I worked it up from an old sketch.’

She took up the little picture and moved it into another light.

‘Do you like it?’ she asked with an uncertainty, strange for her, for Erma generally knew a good thing when she saw it.

‘You’ve never done anything better. I’ll buy it, at your own price.’

‘It’s sold,’ Erma said. ‘And paid for, too,’ she added with a tinge of sullen bitterness.

‘I hope you got a decent price,’ said Derrock, astonished, for he had never heard of Erma selling any pictures.

She didn’t answer. Probably she had sold it for ten dollars to some cheap dealer, he thought. Probably she had needed ten dollars badly; and it occurred to him that he might place an order for a picture from her, anonymously, through a dealer. It made him wretched to think that Erma might be in need of ten dollars.

‘I’m sorry, Erma. I’d like to have that picture. But never mind. Put on your best hat and coat and come out with me to lunch. Then we’ll go to see the pictures at the Academy show, and then we’ll go out to the Woodbine and see the King’s Plate run. There’s a hot tip on the Hamilton stable. We’ll make some money.’

She came rather reluctantly, still with backward glances at her ‘Chimaera’. But she ate a good lunch of everything that Derrock could think of to buy for her, and she looked without open revulsion at the pictures in the exhibition. But she was thinking of her own pictures all the time.

‘Don’t you think that painting is a most infantile pursuit, Erma? The less a painter knows the better he paints. That’s a well-established fact, and it’s the same with musicians. Now a writer, like myself, has to know a great deal. He has to know all the different methods of committing crimes and of detecting them—how to blow safes and how to take finger-prints. He has to know the slang of gambling, journalism, kidnapping, police work, aviation, the mechanism of racing cars, and of high-powered radio transmission, and all the railway, steamship and air timetables of the whole world; and the names and some details about all the Grand Hotels of every city in civilization. If he makes a break in any of these things he might as well be a

Toronto newspaper reporter. Authorship is a highly skilled trade, and it seems to me . . .’

There was a stir in the room at this moment. Everybody looked up. Lola Matanzas had just come into the gallery, through the door at the other end. Two other young women were with her, belonging to the same stock company; and they went straight to Lola’s portrait, without glancing at anything else.

Erma glanced indifferently at the trio without recognition, and Derrock turned his head away, but he managed to look out of the corner of an eye.

Lola was dressed exactly as in the portrait, and she placed herself exactly in front of it, staring it in the face. Her two companions stood at her shoulders impressed, immensely jealous, not saying a word. Lola and her counterfeit stared one another full in the face; and Lola’s stare seemed to gain in power and pride as it was reflected back from the canvas; and the canvas reflected her face again, so that it was like a perspective of Lola’s, seen in a hall of mirrors. Two or three people paused and passed. There were not many people in the gallery, for it was early in the afternoon. It was not enough for Lola. She would have liked a crowded gallery, people lined up in a queue, police directing the traffic past her; ‘keep moving, please!’

‘We’d better go, Erma, or we’ll miss the first race,’ Derrock said anxiously. ‘You don’t want to see any more of this show, do you?’

Erma didn’t want to see any more of it, and she went with him willingly. She glanced back from the doorway at the five hundred works of Canadian art, and her chin tilted up a little. She was thinking of her picture.

Derrock had left the Jupiter just outside the gallery, and they got in and started westwards.

‘Yes, making pictures is really the most infantile occupation of the human mind. Nobody ought to do it who knows how to do anything else.’

‘But I don’t know how to do anything else, Ford.’

‘I’ll teach you something better—how to drive a car.’

‘What’s the use? I haven’t got a car.’

‘I’ll get you a car. Let me give you a car, Erma. You can paint me a picture for it. A nice little Ford coop, or maybe an Essex roadster.’

Erma laughed, sharply.

‘I could have a Cadillac for the asking, Ford.’

She must have a touch of megalomania, Derrock thought. He didn't think that Erma even knew the name of this lofty and costly car; but probably she was confusing it with a Chevrolet.

'I'll get you a Chevrolet, Erma. You really ought to have a car. I can't imagine how you've lived without one. I've been without my car for almost a week; it's been in the shop for overhauling; and you can hardly conceive my delight at getting it back. I was entirely lost without it. I drifted around hardly existing, better dead. But I've had all the valves ground, and an entirely new set of sparking-plugs and new rings in two cylinders where it was pumping oil, and you see how much better it runs. Unfortunately I forgot to have that door-latch tightened up. I'll fall out sideways some day. But see how quick she is now on the pick-up. I really believe she would make ninety now, if I gave her the gas. You must come out with me some afternoon, and I'll show you some speed. We might make a hundred. We'll drive to Hamilton and have dinner there, and come back in the evening.'

'All right, Ford. That will be lovely.'

Erma liked such little excursions, and she brightened up as they drove through the crowded streets. Toronto was lively that week; it was a great week for the city. The races were on the Woodbine track; and the great classic, the King's Plate, was to be run that afternoon. It was thought that the Toronto horse had a chance, though Grandee, the Hamilton stable entry, had been most favoured in the early betting. There was also a tennis tournament at Rosedale, a golf tournament at the York Club, besides the exhibition of pictures by the Royal Canadian Academy, which few of the city's population thought about. Moreover, business was picking up again, and the Government was engineering an advantageous trade arrangement with Great Britain. This had produced a great acceleration of patriotism, and everybody ate and drank more.

There was a terrible congestion of traffic on all the streets leading to the racecourse, and Derrock had to drive slowly. There were so many cars waiting at the gates that he did not attempt to go in; besides he knew that it would be hard to get out. He parked the Jupiter in a vacant lot almost opposite the track, paying fifty cents, and he went in with Erma on foot.

The first race was over when they got in, and the Lieutenant-Governor had just arrived in his state automobile to present the cup to the winner of the King's Plate. It was a delicious spring day, neither too sunny nor too cool, and a fresh breeze blew in from the adjoining lake. An enormous crowd flooded the lawns, surged around the pari-mutuels, poured up and

down the sloping tiers of the stands. From the seat that Derrock secured near the top he could see the lake stretching infinitely away to the south, a leaden colourless shimmer. An aeroplane hummed overhead, circling round and round the track, and from the plane the track must have looked like a saucer swarmed around by multi-coloured ants. Women's dresses, sunshades and hats made pointillist, futurist designs, and perhaps these also expressed a philosophy of life. Everywhere Derrock saw people he knew, people whom he partly knew, people whom he felt that he should know. He saw Jimmy Fitzgerald, the Irish-Canadian artist, tremendously sporty in a grey top hat and race glasses slung over his shoulder. He saw Mrs. Spadina-Dundas, slim, alert, with the beautiful waved blue hair, tinted to match her eyes, weighing only ninety pounds stripped, and the best tango dancer in Toronto. She was standing on a seat and looking through her binoculars at something on the lake, perhaps one of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club's boats cruising close inshore. He thought he caught a glimpse of Lola Matanzas in white and black in the members' enclosure. Wallie Weatherford would be there, of course. He had a horse entered for the Plate; what was its name?—Chippewa? He saw Solway Leviticus, looking tremendously English in a new suit of Harris tweeds, made in London, and he was talking animatedly to a friend, perhaps about old junk, perhaps about the best thing for the Cambridgeshire. No doubt Wellington London was there also, but he would be in the members' clubrooms, as close to the Lieutenant-Governor as he could get.

But Erma did not like it on the high seat of the stand. She wanted to walk about.

'We won't be able to see the next race.'

'I don't want to see the race.'

They went circuitously through the weaving, moving crowd. A race was run off, and they saw nothing of it, but only heard the fast drumming of hoofs and the long mob-yell that hailed the winner. Skirting the jam about the betting-machines, they came straight upon Lola Matanzas and Wallie Weatherford.

It was impossible to avoid the meeting. There was a startled pause and hurried greetings.

'And how is the great picture coming on, Miss Frieslander?' Wallie asked, standing with his hat in his hand, excessively polite. Derrock was amazed that he seemed to know her so well.

‘I’ve burned it,’ said Erma perversely, not looking at him, but at Lola, who was wearing a marvellous costume of white with a great deal of black, and shoes and stockings and hat to match.

‘I don’t believe it. You can’t burn that picture. I’m buying it, you know. I’ll come round and see it.’

‘I don’t want you to see it.’

Lola tapped Derrock on the arm, swallowing him up with her huge dark eyes, in which he seemed to detect some flicker of amusement.

‘Why don’t you come and have tea with me some day? Any afternoon when there isn’t a matinee.’

‘Thanks very much. I never drink tea,’ Derrock returned, hot and uncomfortable.

‘A shot of Scotch then. Wallie will be there.’

She laughed delightedly, not devilishly at all, but in pure delighted impudence. Angry and confused, Derrock turned to Wallie with the conventional question.

‘What do you like for the Plate? Oh, I forgot; you have a horse entered yourself. Chippewa, isn’t it?’

‘Chippewa isn’t ready. I expect to win with him soon, but I wouldn’t put any money on him to-day.’

‘What about Grandee?’

‘Grandee is carrying too much weight. He might do for a place and show bet.’

‘What do you like, then?’

‘I’m not backing anything myself, but they say that the wise money is going up on Inkwell.’

Inkwell was the Toronto horse, the Toronto hope. Derrock drew Erma away as a swirl of the betting crowd separated the group.

‘I thought you said you didn’t know her,’ Erma said.

‘God knows, I don’t!’

He saw Mr. Leviticus approaching, and swerved away. A few yards farther and they came upon Edgar Lloyd, wearing a Press badge, and studying the race card with anxiety.

‘What do you like for the Plate?’ he demanded of Derrock.

‘Inkwell.’

‘Inkwell hasn’t a chance,’ said Lloyd, looking at Erma with dislike. He disliked all women, and particularly when they set up to be artists. ‘He would have to beat at least three better horses than himself—Chippewa, Alcazar and Grandee. I think it’s between Grandee and Chippewa.’

‘Chippewa isn’t ready.’

‘So Wallie says, but that’s only to keep the price right. I’ve heard for a fact that he’s backing Chippewa heavily. They say his jockey has orders either to win or to finish absolutely last. I’m going to play both Chippewa and Grandee to win—bound to get one or the other.’

He looked again with disapproval at Erma, and muttered:

‘If you can come round to the Press room I’ll get you a shot of Scotch.’

Derrock placed Erma in her seat again, and went with Lloyd. The Press rooms were crowded with newspaper men, racing men, gambling men, advertising men, and they all had had shots of Scotch. It was against the law for any liquors to be consumed on the racing grounds, for Ontario did not think it right to indulge more than one vice at a time; but the government liquor stores did a double business during race week.

‘What do you like for the Plate, Ford?’ Erma asked him when he came back.

‘Inkwell, and I’m going to play fifty dollars on him.’

Erma plunged in her handbag and brought up her purse.

‘I’ll play fifty too. Put it up with yours.’

The King’s Plate horses were already being paraded, while the band played a patriotic fanfare. Derrock had difficulty in getting through the crowd to place his bet. He noticed that the price on Inkwell was seven, but even as he looked it changed to six. He hastened back to Erma, to see the race.

‘How much do you think we’ll win?’

‘I don’t know what the final price will be. And anyhow, Inkwell may not come in the money at all.’

There was a long delay at the post. Alcazar was behaving badly, and Derrock remembered that he had a bet with Jimmy Fitzgerald that Alcazar

would not even finish third. But Alcazar got off first.

Everybody was standing up on the seats and shouting. He had given his new race-glasses to Erma, but she was not tall enough to see anything except in glimpses between the heads and necks in front of her. But sight was hardly needed; they could hear the changing, circulating outcries as the horses went round the far side of the course.

‘Alcazar leads! Now Chippewa is coming up. Chippewa is ahead!’ they shouted. ‘Chippewa leads at the half. Grandee’s coming up. Grandee’s ahead. Grandee will win.’

And then a yell that split the sky.

‘Look at Inkwell coming! Look at Inkwell! Come on, Grandee! Inkwell! Inkwell! Inkwell!’

Coming from fifth place in the stretch, Inkwell flashed right around the outside of the bunched leaders, and won from Grandee by half a head, in a whipping finish. Chippewa finished absolutely last, and Alcazar did not come one-two-three.

As soon as the numbers were officially announced Derrock went to draw his winnings. On the way he encountered Jimmy Fitzgerald, who had also backed Inkwell, and collected the bet from him on Alcazar.

‘Inkwell didn’t pay so badly,’ he said when he returned to Erma. ‘We win \$420 between us. Here’s your share. It’s really not so bad. Plenty of men, and most women, work half a year for less money. But such people cannot properly be said to be alive.’

‘Thanks, Ford,’ Erma said, delighted. ‘I’ve worked a whole year myself for less money. But then I never had your genius.’

‘No, Erma; it’s only that you never had the right tip. Trust me. I’ll show you how to make plenty of money. What do you like for the next race?’

But they had no tip for this race, and, selecting a horse quite at random, they lost ten dollars apiece. On the next race they did not bet.

‘How about the last race, Erma? I never heard of any of the horses before. Have you any hunch—though on a hunch I’d want a price of at least twenty to one. One should gamble only on solid information. We’re four hundred ahead—suppose we go. In another half an hour the roads will be blockaded.’

The streets around the track area were heavily congested with motors even then, and Derrock was obliged to drive at a slow crawl for a mile. Weary of this, he turned off and dodged through a mile or two of side streets, but the swarms of children playing in the street were worse than the traffic. He returned to Queen Street, and ran into a crowd. There had been a collision, and two smashed cars still stood locked together. A man was talking loudly, with blood streaming off his face, which he continually mopped off with a soaking handkerchief. Two immensely imposing policemen with note-books took down names and addresses; and an avid mob, drawn by the smell of blood, surged and swelled, continually increasing.

Derrock worked his way slowly through this congestion, and got into the central city area at last. Erma wanted to go to her studio before she went anywhere else, and he turned into Church Street, and went up with her. She poured him a drink of rum and ginger ale, and disappeared into her bedroom; and he drank the sweetish, fizzy beverage, and looked at the 'Chimaera'. She had certainly improved it; she might be said to be getting on with it; and yet—what was it all worth, after all? He thought again, and seriously this time, that making pictures was the lowest employment of the human mind, and so was writing and making music. Except writing like his own, which was neither a food nor an intoxicant, but only a sort of dope. There was some good in that; and *Danger* must be considered by a normal and sane mind as the highest point literature had yet reached. All the rest was the bunk. But people had gone quite mad over art nowadays, though they didn't seem actually to use much of it. Yet you couldn't move without running into the arty stuff. Even the primitive savages had been dragged into it, so that there was negro art music, primitive Indian sculpture, Esquimaux poetry maybe, and Aztec and Zuni interior decoration. But all that was the bunk, put across mostly by women who hadn't anything else to do. There was a sudden roar from the garage below, of a raced engine, of a carburettor being tested. That was the stuff, he thought; and a violent wave of the joy and the jazz of life swept through him, with his pockets full of easy money and his veins full of the intoxication of the flash mob. He went to the door of Erma's bedroom and knocked.

'Erma,' he called. 'Let me come in.'

But Erma was in the bathroom beyond, and didn't hear him.

Disappointed, he turned back and looked again at the teddy bear. She had certainly improved it; there was fine modelling in those legs, but the expression of the face, the ecstasy and anguish, the tension, the literary

value—she would never be able to put that across. She had the big idea, indeed. Goya might have made something immense of it, a creation. But women weren't creative—or they were creative only in one way, and even in that they had to have male assistance. But nix on the arty stuff! Down below him the engine thundered. Outside on Church Street a dingy mob flowed northward, a shabby mob of working-people, tired, harassed, better dead. The world was full of far better things than pictures or books, and it was in high speed that human power grows likest God's.

'Do you think I've got it better?' Erma asked anxiously, coming out.

'Yes, very much. Come, let's go and see about reserving a table for dinner, or we won't be able to get one. This is Toronto's crowded day.'

When they applied at the great Viceroy Hotel they found that a table for dinner could not be reserved at any price. They had all been taken. Nor were there any at the Imperial Royal, nor at the Victoria, nor at the Buckingham. Telephone orders for reservations were coming in at every moment, and had to be turned away. All the hotel dining-rooms were booked beyond their capacity. The Toronto horse had won the Plate, and there were going to be dinners, dinner dances, supper dances, filling all the hotels and restaurants. They had no luck anywhere; and at last they returned to the Imperial Royal, where a captain of waiters, heavily tipped, thought that he might get them a table at seven-fifteen sharp, if they were on hand to seize it before anybody else got it.

There was a long time to wait, and they went to a tea-room, and had tea and crumpets and jam, and danced.

'This is the life, Erma!' said Derrock as they fox-trotted. 'To make money easily and blow it in rapidly. To speed from the Art Gallery to the race track, maybe calling at the Liquor Commission store on the way. At night I turn out a novel worth five thousand dollars, and with the proceeds I win ten thousand on the stock market the next day. To dance, to drink, to beat the game—in short, to speed up. That is the life!'

'You're still a decorator, Ford,' said Erma.

Well, why not? Life was like that. It was all an affair of decoration, and Derrock could quote his authorities. It was a background of pale gold such as the Tuscan's early art prefers, heavily plastered with red and black, and the decorations themselves were the ultimate reality. You had to have the gold background, to be sure; but anybody could get that who had the right tip. But as for a solid background for the murals, as for a wall behind it—

there wasn't any wall. If you broke through the gilding and the paper and the stencil, you would find yourself out in the cold—out in the absolute zero of interstellar space, where God moved mysteriously in wave-lengths.

But Erma wasn't in the least philosophical.

'I'm sure you're right, Ford. But let's go to some other place.'

They went out, and Derrock found a tag in his car, a police summons for having exceeded the parking time-limit. But it would take more than a summons to dampen his exhilaration. They went to another tea-room, and had tea, petits-fours and more dancing.

'This is the life, Erma!' he said as they danced. She was looking marvellously pretty. Her face was flushed and her eyes bright, and her hair rose and waved under her hat-brim like softest gossamer, like smoke. Something burned up inwardly in her, illuminating her. Perhaps it was the thought of the two hundred dollars.

'You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw, Erma! I am going to take you by the hand and conduct you through life. I can make any amount of money. We will be a decoration ourselves, in a speeding car, doing over a hundred, for speed is the ultimate garment of Reality, and to speed up is the only way to exist.'

'But,' said Erma, 'how about the people who can't speed up, who can't decorate, who have no cars?'

'There are no such people,' Derrock affirmed, magnificently.

They didn't exist at all, and he had Carlyle to prove it. But Erma was tired.

'How long before we can have dinner? I'm awfully hungry.'

'Quite a long time yet, I'm afraid,' Derrock said, looking at his watch. Erma always got hungry like this whenever she went out with him. Left to herself in her studio, he suspected that she never ate anything, unless maybe sardines and pickles, not any normal human food. 'Let's go on to some other place, though, before I get another summons. We might have a salad or something, if you're hungry.'

They went on to a third tea-room. Opening the door, Derrock was met by the kick-kick of a fast fox-trot:

Where'd you get those lips?
Where'd you get those eyes?
Please make me happy.
And put me wise.

'Not here. This place is full up, I'm afraid,' he said quickly, backing out. He couldn't stand that tune. He would never want to hear it again in his life. It reminded him of the night when he had solved the problem of the universe, waiting for dawn; and the small of his back twinged again at the recollection.

'Let's go to some quieter place. I don't like these noisy joints. We might start on the hors-d'œuvres, and then some soup, just to kill time. Or we don't need to go to the Imperial Royal at all. We can just get a square meal somewhere at any time.'

But Erma didn't want to miss the gay dinner and the dinner-dance.

'No, we mustn't spoil our appetites, and I'm not so hungry as all that. But I'm tired of tea and cakes.'

'We'll drive about a little, and consider it.'

He drove up Yonge Street, edging through the traffic, admiring himself for his skill. Lola Matanzas could hardly have done much better, but Erma did not seem to notice. She took his skill for granted. An idea came to him, a real inspiration.

'You've never seen my new rooms, Erma. Let's go there while we have to wait. I can get together sandwiches, ham and eggs, whisky, tea, provisions of all sorts.'

'I'm not so very hungry now, Ford, and I couldn't eat ham and eggs, but I'd love to see your rooms.'

He drove to his apartment building on the hill, and they went upstairs. Thank heaven! he could leave his car standing on that street as long as he pleased. Inside his rooms, he took off Erma's long coat and lifted off her hat, and her fine hair rose of itself and waved about her head, uncontrollable as smoke. She looked at everything in the room with the utmost interest, at the typewriter, at his scattered manuscript notes, at the books, and the Louis Seize radio. He started the latter going, got a motor-oil talk, and shut it off.

'This is my sitting-room, my atelier. This is where I write my novels at five thousand dollars a throw, but please do not read that sheet in the typewriter. These are merely notes, odd scintillations of genius, not put

together yet. The story is hardly started. I brought up most of the furniture from my old decorating plant down-town.

‘Out here is my kitchenette, used mostly for making coffee. You’re tired of tea, but I will make you the tea that is different. China tea, actually from China. I don’t drink no other kind,’ he added with a reminiscent shudder. ‘Tea with a slice of lemon in it and a dash of rum. Or perhaps you’d rather have a shot of this Scotch.’

Erma refused the Scotch, but Derrock took a stiff shot of it, feeling that he needed it. He turned the electric current on the grill and put on the kettle, while Erma watched his arrangements with greatly pleased interest.

‘It’ll boil in a minute. In here is my bathroom, all white tiles and the newest sanitary conveniences, as you can see. And in here is the place where I sleep.’

‘I think you’ve got an awfully jolly place, Ford.’

She looked at the rather severely-furnished bedroom, at the dresser, the table, the brass bed with its grey blanket coverlet. She looked at herself in the mirror, and tried to smooth her uncontrollable hair. Derrock slipped his arm around her waist, and made her sit down with him on the edge of the bed.

It was all perfectly impromptu; he hadn’t in the least planned it; but he found himself, quite with surprise, endeavouring to divest Erma of her clothes. He was rather inexperienced; he did not quite know the technique. She gave a startled little cry, but didn’t try to escape. Her hands got in his way. He didn’t know whether she was assisting him or preventing him. Odd bits of garments flew in all directions; her shoes fell off. The crucial point, the waist-band of her bloomers, seemed too tight fastened to move, and her dress resisted him; she was sitting on it. A hot wet drop fell on his hand.

‘No . . . oh no, Ford!’ she was whimpering.

He stopped, and looked at her. In his amazement he said idiotically:

‘Why not?’

All tousled, all torn apart, she was sitting perfectly wilted on the bed. Her arms hung limply at her sides. She was entirely helpless, quite incapable of resistance, but her eyes gazed up at him, trickling water. Great drops ran down her cheeks.

‘Oh no, Ford! No—no!’ she moaned.

Her eyes were all screwed up; her face had fallen into slack wrinkles, and he thought that she was the ugliest woman he had ever seen. Suddenly she caught up the grey coverlet and wound it all around herself like a flash. She threw herself into a huddled heap, like a drawn-up animal, with her face down in the pillows. Nothing could be seen of her but one small, perfectly-shaped foot in a rather dirty silk stocking with a large hole in the heel.

‘Oh damn,’ Derrock ejaculated.

He went out and slammed the door. The next moment he almost went back, but something rose in him, preventing him, whether an impulse of vice or of virtue he didn’t know. He caught up his hat and rushed down the stairs to the street. He got into his car and drove furiously southward.

A police whistle yelled at him as he shot over a crossing against the red signal, and probably his number was taken. Another summons! He felt like a fool. He had ‘spared her’ as a melodramatist would say, and a lot of good it had done them! He had half a mind to go back yet, but he knew that it was too late. He ought to cut out the sex stuff. He wasn’t a success at it. He ought to be proof against these sudden fevers. Crossing Harbord street he almost side-swiped a lorry. No particular damage was done, only a little enamel knocked off, but there was an altercation, a gathering crowd, a policeman, and Derrock had his number taken again. Another summons, for he had certainly been in the wrong. Still driving recklessly, he raced down Bathurst Street, and all at once he remembered that he had left the kettle boiling on the grill. It would boil dry, and melt down, unless Erma should think to turn it off. But perhaps she would make herself a cup of tea.

This consideration calmed him. He turned westward, and then north again. A man ought to be immunized against such infections, against such sudden fevers, he thought. A shot of something ought to do it. But a man would have to be immunized very early in life, since the Viennese have taught us that the infant mewling in the nurse’s arms is already deep in the business, and shows a lascivious preference for being held by persons of the opposite sex.

He was growing more calm, and at the same time very hungry. It was getting near the time for them to claim their table at the Imperial Royal. He had been an unutterably blundering fool, but it would be a shame for Erma to be done out of her dinner, and the dance afterwards. She might just possibly be still waiting in his rooms, and he turned, and drove rapidly up-town again.

The apartment was dark. Nobody was in the bedroom. The scattered articles of clothing were all gone, and the disordered pillows and coverlet were neatly smoothed and folded down. In the kitchen the electric grill had been turned off, and the pot and the cup showed that Erma had indeed made herself a cup of tea.

Derrock took a strong shot of whisky, sat down and remained for some time in meditation. Then he changed his clothes for black and white, and drove down town again.

CHAPTER VI

‘Do you not think, Rock, that the whole trouble with our modern world is our intense preoccupation with morality, with questions of right and wrong? The Victorians were nothing to us, nor even the Puritans. They knew for certain which was which, and did not need to think any more about it. But now the standards are all gone, and the moralities are a muddle, and we’re in a perpetual fidget to know which side we’re standing on. Not that it matters . . .’

‘So that as often as not you find yourself perpetrating a virtue when you meant to be practising a vice,’ Derrock said sympathetically.

Edgar Lloyd did not immediately answer, and the sudden crash of the jazz orchestra and the rising swirl of the dancers drowned what he might have been going to say. He caught the eye of a passing waiter.

‘Two more cups of strong tea.’

The waiter nodded wisely and passed. He knew all the newspaper men and saw that they got what they wanted. In a few minutes he was back with the cups of amber beverage, brought all the way from Scotland and still going strong. It was against the law to serve anything stronger than wine in a hotel dining-room, and no wine less than champagne was being drunk on that festival night in the Imperial Royal. But Derrock was host, and he wasn’t buying champagne.

Lloyd sipped his tea, knocked his ashes in the saucer, and observed the seething dinner-dance with the air of a professional immoralist. Dark, handsome, slender, in a beautifully cut dinner jacket, he looked mournful. He hated women, and, so far as Derrock knew, led an exemplary life. He had no vices except his gambling, and you could hardly call that a vice since it was his means of support, at least by intention. But he was accustomed to converse in such a tone of literary licentiousness that you would have taken him for Casanova, or at the very least for George Moore. He had no abnormalities, except that he never went to bed, but spent his nights in winning money at cards or in reading poetry. Yet his imagination revelled in obscure and corrupt and perverse and unmentionable practices, and he seemed to talk of them with such expert knowledge, quoting from Catullus and Krafft-Ebing and Swinburne, so that you would have taken him for the Marquis de Sade, or for Catulle Mendes at the very least. He was indeed

accustomed to drink all the liquor that ever came his way, but you could hardly call this a vice either, since it never seemed to have any effect upon him. Yet, going still farther, or coming back, he spoke mystically of the strange pleasures and vices implicit in utter purity, of the subtle sensuality of chastity, of the atrocious debaucheries in total abstinence from everything, quoting freely from Verlaine and Francis Thompson and Juan de la Cruz, returning again to the iniquities of doing everything and nothing, returning upon himself like the dragon biting its own tail, the Chinese symbol of eternity. The Nietzschean eternal recurrence—the serpent swallowing itself.

‘It’s one of the results of the war,’ said Derrock.

‘They lay everything to the war,’ said Lloyd. ‘At least everything undesirable. I think myself that the war did more good than anything in the last five centuries, and I only wish we could have more of them. No, the trouble comes of the undue influence of women, and their ideas—if you can call them ideas. Women don’t like the clear rules. They don’t like definitions. They’re unable to understand them. They naturally like a mess, a muddle. They like their virtue and vice stirred together into a cocktail. They find it more stimulating that way. And of course women take the sex relationships much more easily than men do. It comes more natural to them.’

‘Why do you think that?’ asked Derrock, astonished, for Lloyd knew nothing of women except to despise them.

Lloyd answered only with a contemptuous gesture. He didn’t think it; he knew it. It was a primary concept, a categorical imperative. Again the exciting roar of the music drowned out what he might have said. Couples swirled past, shuffling in the crowded fox-trot, black and white, orange and scarlet and blue and green and yellow. Between the mirrors and the lights, through the smoke of cigarettes and the fumes of provender, the Gold Room seemed to vibrate dizzily. It was a great night in Toronto; all the swell mob was in that Gold Room, all the flash mob. At the far end of the room the celebrated Imperial Royal orchestra, complete with tom-toms, motor-horns, and cow-bells, crashed out the native African music, composed by black-faced Polish Jews in Harlem. They played it with amazing genius, lifting it in a series of impossible crescendos above the noise of laughter and the shuffle of dancing and the rattle of dishes, like an African incantation scrambled with the *Simphonia Domestica*. You couldn’t tell which was jazz and which was smashed plate.

‘It’s even worse in literature,’ Lloyd said earnestly, leaning over the table for Derrock to hear him. ‘It’s all infected with the poison of the Puritan or

the Diabolist. Anti-toxins, anti-serums. Our most immoral writers are full of it, feverish with questions of right and wrong. If it were not for that they would not be immoral at all, and perhaps they would not even be writers. When anything is kept under pressure it tries to break out. If physical satisfaction followed immediately upon physical desire there wouldn't be any such thing as love. But under repression, the stuff ferments and develops the intoxicating mystery, in short, the gas. If we fully understood life there would be no poetry. If we understood death there would be no religion.'

'So that, in fact, our art and religion and poetry are due to the Puritan, the policeman and the obscurantist,' said Derrock.

Lloyd didn't deny it. It wasn't what he had set out to demonstrate, quite the contrary, but he was perfectly capable of holding several conflicting opinions at the same time.

'How was the market to-day, Lloyd? What did Cuban Gas do?'

Lloyd did not answer, his mind trying to move in two opposite directions at once. Around them the room reeled with colour and roared with rhythm. Derrock reflected that festivities exactly like this were proceeding at that moment at all points within the same degree of longitude, north and south. Hotel dinner-dances, indistinguishable from this, were going on in Buffalo, in Detroit, in St. Louis, in New Orleans. Thousands of men and women were fox-trotting at that moment, exactly resembling the ones in this room, all so exactly alike that if you cut off their heads you could not possibly tell them apart, unless perhaps by the contents of their pockets. Certainly not by the contents of their heads. Two thousand miles long, that great wave of the dinner-dance was moving westward at a thousand miles an hour, a vast tidal wave, topped with shirt-fronts and twirling frocks, black and white, yellow and orange, moving at the speed of the revolution of the earth. In a few hours it would flood over the Pacific coast. It would cross the ocean on the luxury liners, subside, but not die, in Shanghai and Harbin. Swelling high and deep again in Vienna and London and Paris, it would cross the ocean on the Atlantic luxury liners, and arrive again in New York and Buffalo and Toronto with its crest of froth and rouge and black—to-morrow night so exactly the same as to-night that you could not tell them apart if you had happened to sleep through the interval. The eternal recurrence—the serpent biting its own tail.

'Everything is in solution now,' said Lloyd sadly. 'The world is at present a badly mixed cocktail. No doubt the solution will crystallize upon new polar points in time, into new virtues and new forms of evil. That is

what Nietzsche tried to put across, but he didn't have the necessary scientific knowledge and so he skidded off into mere poetry. But the transvaluation of all values will hardly come in our time.'

He looked sadly into his empty tea-cup and tried to catch the eye of a waiter. The great Gold Room of the Imperial Royal was full of people, sitting, standing, eating, drinking strong tea and champagne. It was a great night in town, a festival. People had come in from everywhere, for the races, for the golf and tennis tournaments. The Toronto horse had won the plate, and all his backers were celebrating it with their winnings. Business was improving, and the Canadian Parliament had just concluded a trade arrangement with Great Britain by which Canadian potatoes were to be admitted into the Old Country at a preferential rate of duty, thus knocking another nail into the coffin of British agriculture. This had produced a great acceleration of Imperial patriotism. Trade with the Mother Land! A large British flag had been draped on the wall behind the orchestra, and it quivered uneasily in the blast of the Black Bottom. Millions of dollars would come into Canada under the new tariff, into the pockets of the shippers, the steamer people, the big wholesale men—though probably not much into the pockets of the producers. But there were no potato-growers at that dinner-dance.

There were more than a hundred men in that room, all dressed in black and white exactly like Lloyd and Derrock, and many of them spent in a year more than either Lloyd or Derrock might earn in their whole lives. There were more than a hundred women, all more or less connected with these men, all dressed with the utmost determination to be different, and yet somehow looking all alike. All the sporting set was there, the military set, the smart up-town set, the big business set, celebrating something, anything, celebrating the easiness of a lot of money. People had come in from Hamilton, from London, from Niagara Falls. It was a festival, a riot. In a series of explosions, the orchestra discharged the negro art music made in Harlem. Even the waiters were excited, run off their feet, fox-trotting involuntarily as they moved, such was the spell of the music. He saw Mr. Solway Leviticus, tremendously well-groomed and English, in a new London evening suit, dancing with an actress from the Star Theatre. He saw Mrs. Spadina-Dundas with the beautiful blued hair, dancing with a handsome college boy, and as they were both a little drunk their attitudes were frequently less than decent. He caught a glimpse of Doris Dovercourt in a green and silver dancing frock, a mere *mouchoir* of a frock, apparently without either top or bottom or front or back, the purely abstract idea of a frock, possessing neither parts nor magnitude, but looking as if it had cost a

great deal of money. She was vibrating, sparkling, rouged and lip-sticked to the last degree, looking like a made-up maenad, and she was dancing with young Dan Mayberry, of whom Derrock did not know any good. The great English actress who happened to be in Toronto on tour was there too, but she was neither dancing nor drinking nor smoking. She was merely eating a good deal, and at intervals she rested her elbows on the table and contemplated the dance with an air exactly like Edgar Lloyd. What a shame, Derrock thought, that Erma was missing all this. It was his fault, but he had not been able to remedy it.

‘How did Gas close to-day, Lloyd? What do they think about it?’ he asked again, for he really wanted to know.

‘Gas?’ said Lloyd vaguely, reconcentrating his mind. ‘It was down three-eighths . . . closed at 86-1/4. Are you still holding it? I think you’re wrong.’

Derrock was in the market again. After long study of the chart and the technical position of the market, he had picked Cuban Gas as due for a rise. He consulted Danforth the broker, and Danforth thought it was good for a bet anyway, but not too much. So Derrock put a thousand dollars into it. Gas was a solid stock; it should be as safe as the bank, and in fact it almost immediately rose two points. Derrock held on, congratulating himself on his judgment. But then it stood still a long time; then lost a point; gained a half; and then suddenly slumped three points in an afternoon. Now it seemed weakening again, and he would have to think about putting up more margin, or else taking his loss.

‘I think you’re playing it the wrong way, Rock. I think it’ll go lower before it’s higher. I’m a natural bear, and I believe the whole list is too high. Look at Minnesota Silk . . .’

‘Excuse me a moment, Lloyd. I see somebody I must speak to.’

Derrock got up quickly and made his way around the tables and the dancers. He didn’t want to hear about the bear side of the market; he knew too much about that already. He thought of dancing with somebody; but just then the music stopped and the dancers subsided, settling down at the tables like a cloud of multi-coloured butterflies.

He went out into the hotel lobby. It was full of promenading couples, black and white, silver and crimson. Waiters hurried by with cups of tea, ices and soda. He saw Doris and her boy partner settling on a sofa with ice-cream sodas, and then he saw Lola Matanzas coming from the cloak-room. Apparently she had just arrived, and Wallie did not appear to be with her.

Derrock slipped aside, evading her, and went to the street door of the hotel. The door was wide open. It was a very hot, still night, and he thought of his car parked behind the hotel. He would rather be out on the road than in that dancing-room. He was tempted again to go and try to find Erma. He had gone to her place twice already, but the windows were dark, and nobody answered his knocking. They had been two fools, poisoned by the Puritan, maybe; and now she was missing all the fun. He would have gone after her again, but he had no hope that she would open the door.

So he returned to the Gold Room, where another dance was about to begin, and saw Lloyd sitting alone at his table. He had obtained another cup of tea, and was smoking gloomily, as if meditating upon the epidemic of righteousness. Lola was not in sight anywhere. It was hot and close in the great room, in spite of open windows and electric ventilators, and there was a thick smell of women and cigarettes, of grease and musk and alcohol. With a penetratingly sweet wail of the saxophones and a crash of tom-toms, the orchestra opened and swung into the vast volume of the African invocation. Derrock was too late again to get a partner. Mrs. Spadina-Dundas was dancing with Solway Leviticus and appeared to be trying to blend the Charleston with the tango. He saw Doris Dovercourt dancing now with an elderly bald-headed man, who held her very close and leaned over her with the grave leer of an old goat. What sort of god was speaking in their ears? Derrock wondered. Crash! crash! crash! the admirable orchestra broke out the black art music. Triumphant, laughing, the god fox-trotted among his devotees, making them happy, putting wise to the transvaluation of all values. Round and round the room the black wave swept, carrying its froth of black and white, of crimson and silver, the black, strong-smelling torrent that came out of the tubes and tom-toms, the strings and the cow-bells. Derrock's scalp tingled, his fingers twitched, his feet wriggled involuntarily. But he was wedged against the wall, and there he was obliged to stand, perspiring, to the end of the act of worship.

When the music stopped he saw Doris and her partner disappear into one of the small adjoining rooms. Derrock passed the door a few minutes later, and heard a sound within, like a sharp slight explosion. The elderly gentleman came out quickly, looking very agitated, with one cheek very red, as if he had suffered a unilateral attack of conscience. Derrock looked into the small room. It contained a large tub of palms in the middle, a couple of small tables, and a cushioned bench, and behind the palms he saw a flash of green and silver.

‘Hello, Doris!’ he said.

She was sitting on the bench and she seemed to be trying to look at the back of her neck.

‘Hello Rock!’ she looked up at him, sparkling, and broke into delighted laughter. ‘Did you see grandpa? He tried to kiss me, and I had to smack him. He bit my shoulder, though.’ She twisted her head again, trying to look at the place. ‘Can you see it? Put some powder on it, will you?’

Derrock looked and discovered the slight, reddish imprint of false teeth on the plump shoulder. He wiped it with his handkerchief, and pressed his lips upon the spot.

‘That will make it well.’ He touched it up with the powder puff she handed to him. ‘And that will make it invisible.’

She laughed again, sparkling, radio-active.

‘You think it won’t turn black and blue? Damn him anyway! Couldn’t we have something cool to drink?’

‘Scotch? or soda?’

‘Soda . . . pineapple.’

Derrock procured two ice-cream sodas, and they sucked them through straws. The music started again, and she licked the last of the cream up with her spoon.

‘Let’s dance.’

‘Aren’t you tired, Doris?’

‘What d’you mean—tired? Why, I’ve got two more parties on after this one to-night. I’m never tired. Just feel that muscle.’

She thrust out a slim, apple-green silk stocking, and Derrock felt it carefully. The rounded calf was full of steel wires. Her small knee also was like iron; but her thigh seemed softer, and. . . .

‘Cut it out, Rock! This isn’t a petting party. Do you want to dance or not? If you don’t, I think I’ve got somebody else on my card.’

She was hard as nails. Derrock danced, and then surrendered her to another man, who got her a pineapple sundae. Looking down the room, Derrock saw that Edgar Lloyd was no longer at their table, but he discovered Lloyd near the door, trying to catch his eye, signalling to him.

‘You were on Inkwell this afternoon, weren’t you, Rock?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you win much? Listen, Rock! I’ve got hold of a good thing. Chippewa is all fixed to win day after to-morrow. His running to-day was only a bluff. Lola told me. I’ve just been talking to her.’

‘Did she invite you to tea?’

‘No. There’s sure to be a good price on Chippewa, after his bad showing to-day. I’d expect five or six to one. Lola told me to pass the tip to you. Suppose we go halves on it. Can you lend me a hundred?’

‘I’m not playing any of Lola’s tips.’

‘Lend me fifty, then, and I’ll play it myself. It’s as safe as the bank.’

Derrock still had his afternoon winnings in his pocket, and he lent Lloyd the fifty. He didn’t mind. It had been easy money, but he hardly expected ever to see it again, though very likely Chippewa would win. He was the last man in the world to disparage Lola’s tips, but for himself he wasn’t taking any.

He talked for some time with Lloyd in the lobby. He looked out into the street again, and thought of going home. This wasn’t much fun after all, considering the money it had cost him. It would have been a great deal more fun if Erma had been with him.

Turning back into the lobby, he was surprised to see Doris, wearing her hat and a long loose coat, looking about anxiously as if she wanted something.

‘Oh, Rock! Have you seen anything of Dan Mayberry?’

‘No. What’s the matter, Doris? You’re not going away—not as early as this?’

‘Yes, I promised to look in at the Egerton’s dance in Hamilton sometime before midnight. Dan brought me here, and he’s got to take me away. But I can’t find him.’

Together they searched everywhere for Dan, but without success. Nobody had seen him for some time.

‘I expect he’s drunk,’ Doris said. ‘Never mind. I’ll get them to call me a taxi.’

‘I’ll get you a taxi. Or no, Doris. I can do better than that. My car is out here, and I’ll drive you over to Hamilton myself.’

‘Will you, Rock? That’ll be splendid, and you can come with me to the Egerton’s party. Get your hat and hurry.’

Derrock got his hat and light coat, and took his car out of the hotel parking yard. There was a great crowd of cars in front of the hotel. He had to go some distance to be able to draw up to the kerb, and he got out to look for Doris. She came up quickly, and slipped into the cockpit and sat down behind the wheel.

‘Get in, Rock. I’ll drive.’

‘You can’t drive that car, Doris. You’ll smash it.’

‘Can’t drive it?’ Doris exclaimed indignantly. ‘There isn’t any kind of car that I can’t drive. Besides, I know all about a Jupiter. My brother used to have one exactly like this. Come on, Rock, or you’ll be left.’

She was quite capable of driving off without him. Derrock didn’t like it in the least, but he let her have her way. But he saw at once that he could trust her skill, as she turned the Jupiter out and into the traffic. She could drive better than he could. She could drive as well as Lola Matanzas. King Street was crowded, but she slipped through the traffic like an eel, taking chances that he wouldn’t have risked. But then, it wasn’t her car. Perhaps women were naturally better drivers than men, he thought, especially with other people’s cars.

‘Some bus!’ she said expertly. ‘When we get out of the crush a little I’m going to let her out.’

The lighted street flowed flashing past, but there was far too much crush for any speed. She turned up Spadina, out Bloor Street, into the suburbs. The houses grew more widely spaced; the procession of motors thinned. The Jupiter speeded up.

‘Go easy, Doris! I’ve had three summonses to-day already.’

She laughed, radiant, with her eyes on the fast-flowing grey pavement ahead, brilliant in the Jupiter’s lights. She was going at more than the speed limit then, at more than forty, with her loose cloak blowing back, its loose sleeves falling back from her arms, and one long green-stockinged leg reaching to the accelerator. At the Cooksville railway crossing the gong was ringing and the wigwag signal going.

‘Pull up, Doris, for God’s sake!’

She laughed and shot across, a hundred feet in front of the coming train. Cooksville village flickered past, mostly in darkness, lit by the glare of the

red service stations. With one hand Doris pulled off her hat and thrust it to Derrock to hold. The Jupiter speeded up—fifty—fifty-five—the little illuminated ribbon of figures, like a ticker tape, moved and trembled on the dashboard.

‘Ease off, Doris! This car cost me a thousand dollars.’

She laughed, with a mocking sparkling glance aside at him, as she bent over the wheel. What was a thousand dollars? It was a good deal to Derrock, and, besides, he loved his Jupiter. And he was superstitious about that car. It was a man-killer, and it was bound to have another life.

The speed-ribbon rolled round to sixty. He had driven faster than that himself, but it was on a clear road, not on a highway with a dozen cars to the mile, going both ways. Doris shot past all these cars as if they had been standing still. Cars that met them were a mere whiz, a blur of light and speed. Like a smooth torrent of slate the Hamilton highway flowed under them. Sixty-five, and past it to seventy.

Derrock ceased to fear for his car. If they smashed now, it would not be the Jupiter alone that would be a total loss. Every time Doris swerved to pass a car he held his breath in anticipation of sudden death. They were moving at nearly a hundred feet a second; they could crash into another car almost before they could see it. Space was nearly abolished. Speed was the Ultimate Reality. People who couldn't speed up didn't exist; and they ceased to exist if they speeded up too much. Doris shot round a startled Ford, and came deftly back to her own side of the road again. Seventy-five came into sight on the ribbon.

Derrock ceased to think about anything. Both their lives hung on the events of a split second, on the instant reaction of those slim fingers on the wheel, on that little silver-slippered foot that pressed the gas pedal. A big saloon went by them like a flare of lightning, like a bolt of death. He clung to Doris' green and silver hat, and remembered that loose door-latch, that had never been repaired. If she leaned against it, it might fly open; she would lose her balance, wreck them. But he wouldn't speak to her again. His stomach felt melting down inside him, but he was determined to be a sport. She might kill them if she liked. The wind rushed over the open car in a tempest, and everything was a blur of darkness but that vivid sliding strip of pavement in the headlights, and the steady glow on the instrument board under the dashlight. Doris leaned over the wheel, intent, excited, her eyes on the road, her hair blowing back, her cloak blown aside from the silvery dance frock, flashing, like a fairy turned speed demon.

Derrock heard a sound behind him, a shrill, rising, angry shrieking, continuous; and, looking back, he saw the powerful single light of a fast motor cycle.

‘Slow down, Doris! There’s a speed cop.’

She laughed and said something, half lost in the whirlwind, ‘for a sheep as well as a lamb’, and pressed down on the accelerator. The speed figure quivered up to eighty. In that velocity Derrock’s mind seemed to dissolve into pure sensation. He felt dissolved into pure speed himself, into Ultimate Reality. The siren howled threateningly, right behind. Doris laughed wildly, and pressed down on the accelerator. The ribbon rolled. For one blurred second Derrock really thought he saw ninety. The speed cop was at their rear wheels. Derrock reached out and turned off the switch.

The roar of the Jupiter’s engines suddenly ceased. But with its enormous momentum the heavy car still shot forward. Doris snatched at the switch button with one hand. The car swerved, went off the pavement upon the road shoulder, which luckily was hard and level. With amazing skill and strength, Doris wrenched it back on the road again, but she hadn’t restarted the engine. The police cycle was alongside, crowding against them, and the driver turned a blinding spotlight into the Jupiter. Doris had to stop. The brakes squealed; the Jupiter slowed and stopped, panting.

‘God damn you, Rock!’ Doris shrieked. ‘If you’d let me alone I’d have left him.’

‘Say, what’s this—a suicide pact?’ exclaimed the cop, stopping beside them. ‘What do you think this is?—the Indianapolis speedway? Say, do you know that you were doing over eighty?’

‘A lot better than that. I hit damn close to a hundred!’ Doris cried. ‘Say, Bobby, am I a driver, or ain’t I?’

She was all tousled and dishevelled, her hair blown out of its wave, her cheeks flushed brighter than the rouge, her cloak blown away from the green and silver dance frock, radiant, palpitating, violent. The cop looked at her, and melted into reluctant admiration.

‘I’ll say you are, sister!’ he said with an angry grin. ‘I guess anybody’d make a suicide pact with you. You’re too good for this earth. You’d better drive an airplane where you’ll be up out of the traffic. Does this car belong to you, or your boy friend?’

‘It’s his,’ Doris said, ‘but I’ll pay the fines.’

‘You’ll have to fix that with him. He’s the one that’ll get fined.’

He wrote out the police document in the spotlight, and gave it to Derrock, carefully taking Derrock’s number, name and address.

‘Better let your friend drive the rest of the way home. Next time you make any suicide pact, let me know, and I’ll order the flowers.’

The motor cycle thudded noisily away. Doris looked at Derrock, sparkling, radiant, bursting into laughter.

‘Damn you, Rock! But wasn’t that the most absolutely glorious ride you ever had in your life?’

She slipped aside from the wheel and flung herself headlong upon Derrock’s breast. Her arms, falling bare out of their sleeves, clung warmly around his neck. Their lips came violently together; her body palpitated against him, and Derrock’s flesh seemed to dissolve into velocities of sensation hitherto undreamed of.

‘Let’s get off the highway,’ she whispered. ‘Drive on a little—into a side-road.’

Derrock took the wheel and drove on, unsteadily and slowly. In a few hundred yards he perceived an intersection, a country road, and turned into the cross-way. He came down into a little valley, a hollow densely wooded with beeches, standing still and dark in the hot night. He stopped the car, turned off the lights, and they went into the beech woods.

CHAPTER VII

In the Traffic Court next morning Derrock was obliged to pay fines aggregating \$68.00, on the different counts against him. He did not mind that. What was \$68.00? But in addition he had his driver's permit suspended for three weeks. But he did not mind that much either. It would give him a chance to get on with his new story for *Danger*, and the car was only a temptation to waste time.

He determined to spend these three weeks in solid hard work. He had the skeleton of his story, but nothing more. Time was passing, the summer was passing, and he would have to put on more speed if he were going to turn out even four novels a year.

He even sold his Cuban Gas. It had gone up, and then down again, fluctuating, and he could do nothing but think of the market. He took a small loss on his trade, and immediately afterwards the stock rallied sharply. But he refused to think about it. Impossible to gamble and write fiction at the same time. His book was the first consideration.

He was going to call it 'Cold Blood'. He had the first incident partly written, where a gang of polite, masked bandits hold up all the guests in a Chicago night club. They do not rob the guests, but merely take all their finger-prints. His hero has been much taken with a girl of surprising beauty, dark like a South American. She almost faints with terror at the raid. 'Kiss me!' she says hysterically. The hero kisses her, and feels something slipped from her mouth into his, something like a small coin. When the finger-prints are looked over, the girl is taken away by the bandits.

The coin-like object turns out to be a metal disc engraved with strange hieroglyphics. A splendid beginning, Derrock thought. Of course it wasn't by any means a Stendhalian sort of story. It was hardly even like Rider Haggard. It promised to be exactly like *Danger*, and that was desirable but he didn't want to write like that.

From Edgar Lloyd, to whom he told his troubles, he got no sort of sympathy. Lloyd of course knew that Derrock had sold a story to *Danger*, but he had not deigned to comment on the fact.

'Anybody can write melodrama,' he said superciliously.

‘If you think so, you’d better try it,’ Derrock said with some irritation. ‘You’d make a good deal more than you do by playing the market.’

Chippewa had finished first, with the mutuels paying \$6.20, and Lloyd had immediately put his winnings, including Derrock’s fifty, into the short side of Minnesota Silk. That stock was certainly due to collapse; it was far too high. Lloyd said it was bound to drop ten points before it found its level, but it stood still, and even showed a slight tendency to advance.

‘I’m not interested in melodrama. I’m only interested in literature,’ said Lloyd, still disdainfully.

‘The trouble with literature is that it isn’t half melodramatic enough. That’s why it isn’t realistic. It doesn’t represent life as we feel it. Life is an extremely melodramatic thing—anybody’s life—the janitor’s, the corner grocer’s. It may look flat to you, but it isn’t flat to the man who’s undergoing it. It’s full of exciting things to him, hopes and fears, successes and failures, love and hate, birth and death. He lives among ghastly crimes and fearful revenges and enormous generousities, and vague communing with gods and devils and the spirits of the dead. He doesn’t tell you about these things, and they never get into actual existence, but they colour the grocer’s real life, his inward life, the only life that really exists. They are far more real than his tea and sugar. Every man is a treasure-hunter and a potential criminal. Everybody at one time or another has seriously contemplated suicide or murder or adultery or robbery or rape, and a great number of people have actually committed them. To any natural mind, melodrama must seem perfectly natural. It is the way people naturally feel. The Elizabethans had the right idea, with their blood-and-thunder mixtures. Life is like that—the real life, the inner life, the only life that anybody really knows—all ecstasies and adorations and bloody revenges and immense wealth and fabulous generousities and communings with God and the Devil.’

Lloyd smiled, still more superciliously.

‘That’s all very well. But your editors won’t let you write about the revenges and devils and obscenities.’

As usual, Lloyd had put his finger on it. *Danger* certainly wouldn’t let him write like Webster or Cyril Tourneur. It wouldn’t even let him write quite like Shakespeare. The utmost permissible would be to write like Rider Haggard, and ‘Cold Blood’ was not quite a Haggardian sort of story.

But he worked at it. The story should have been finished in a month, at an ordinary expert rate of production; yet at the end of two weeks he had

hardly begun it. Then by a prodigious effort he went ahead, but he liked it less and less as he went on.

His driving permit was returned to him, but he refrained from using it. He continued to work at his novel. He stuck fast in the fourth chapter. He couldn't think how to make the cursed thing go. He read over what he had written, and was appalled. Rider Haggard could have written better. It wasn't even good enough for *Danger*. But Larry Donovan probably wouldn't see anything wrong.

Mortally sick of the thing, he went out in his car. He drove to Detroit, to Owen Sound. He called at Erma's studio to take her to Owen Sound with him, and was astonished to find Wallie Weatherford there. They seemed to be discussing the 'Chimaera', and they were very cordial to him and gave him a drink, but he did not stay long. Again he was amazed that Wallie seemed to know Erma so well, and he remembered that she had said that Wallie was going to buy the picture.

He looked about for Doris. Dancing was going on in the afternoon tea-rooms, and he had looked for her before but he had not found her. He had never seen her since that night of speed and sweetness. He might have telephoned to her, but he hesitated. He looked through all the tea-rooms, the Imperial Royal, the Viceroy, the Victoria, but there was no flashing little figure in green and silver.

But he found her next afternoon at the Teraulie. She was no longer in green and silver, but in a confection of mauve and pale yellow that looked very fetching and expensive. She was sitting at a table with two girls he did not know, all of them devouring ice-cream sodas. It was an interval between dances, and she looked up, surprised, radiant, delighted.

'Hello, Rock! Where have you been?'

'Hello, Doris? I've been looking for you.'

The music started with a crash. She got up alertly.

'Let's dance.'

The room was not very full, and there was plenty of room to trot and turn up and down between the tables.

'Where have you been all this time, Doris? I've looked for you everywhere, every day, but I never could find you.'

'Mostly at home, Rock. I was up at Muskoka Wharf for a couple of weeks. I was down in Quebec for a while. Have you really been looking for

me? What did you want me for?’

‘Can’t you guess?’

She threw back her head with an affectation of haughtiness. But she couldn’t keep it up. Her eyes sparkled, and she broke into laughter, with an irrepressible wriggle of delight.

‘Wasn’t that the most absolutely glorious ride you ever had in your life, Rock? How much did they fine you?’

‘I don’t remember. The whole thing was the most absolutely glorious time I ever had. I didn’t think I’d live through it, but I did. You must come out in my car again, only I’m going to drive next time. Let me drive you back to Hamilton, Doris. When are you going?’

‘Dan Mayberry is here with me, and he’s going to drive me back. You know, he wasn’t drunk that night, after all. He’d just gone upstairs to see a friend who was staying at the hotel. He didn’t know I wanted to leave, and he was wild when he found I’d gone.’

She laughed up at him, vibrant, radio-active, but not yielding.

‘Served him right. You must drive again with me, Doris. We’ll go again to that same place.’

But Doris refused to respond.

‘What’s the matter with you, Rock?’

‘Can’t you guess?’

‘No, I can’t. We had a good time that night, but you don’t want to go on doing the same thing over and over till you’re sick of it, do you?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘Well, I don’t,’ said Doris, decisively.

He left her at her table to eat another sundae; and she smiled at him as he went away, the bored, candid, malicious smile of a bad baby.

‘Women like their virtue and vice stirred together into a cocktail,’ he thought. ‘Lloyd ought to know her. She would greatly enlarge his mind.’

He thought he would like to see Lloyd. He looked for him, but could not find him. He was not back at his newspaper office, and the financial offices were closed now. Impossible to say where Lloyd might be—probably eating sandwiches at some studio, and talking about the theory of poetry. It was

late; it was getting near dinner-time; but Derrock had eaten tea and cinnamon toast and cakes at the tea-rooms and had no desire for any dinner. He went home instead, and began to work on his story.

He wrote two or three pages on his typewriter and stopped, shocked at what he had written. It wasn't even up to the level of *Danger*. God! how he hated it he thought, thinking of Stendhal. And yet, God! what a joke it was, thinking of Edgar Wallace. It really was amusing, really funny; and after all he was sure Larry Donovan would like it.

But, reluctant, he lay back on his easy couch, and picked up the book he had been reading:

. . . sweep downward to the River Plate.
Death and the Raven brood above,
But Sweeney guards the horned gate.

It was precisely the treasures of the River Plate that was to be the subject of his story. Eliot wasn't hard reading when you learned to take him easy. There was a time when Browning was considered a difficult writer. Derrock turned on the radio, and a Berceuse came over the air, so soft, so sweet, so intolerably sweet that it caught the strings of the heart, and turned the most idiotic phase of life into a sentimental glow. That was the sort of thing to avoid. Cut out the arty stuff! Doris was perfectly right, and so was Edgar Lloyd. Emotions weren't any good, nor ideas either. Sensation and speed—they were the only realities. Without them, the universe would cease to exist, or would continue in an entirely different form. In short, melodrama was the only reality. He couldn't write like Stendhal but he believed he could write better than Edgar Wallace. Four stories a year, at \$2,000 apiece should enable him to live. He thought he would buy Erma's picture. He didn't know what Wallie Weatherford could want with it. The picture rose in his mind's eye as he dozed, with the radio still going.

Something like the jangle of a bell awakened him. A strain of dying music was in his ears, mingling with the bell. A voice spoke in the room.

'This programme comes to you through the courtesy of the Tenth Street Tailors. And now before signing off, friends, I would like to tell you all that we have just received a large importation of the finest English and Scottish tweeds and serges . . .'

The telephone bell rang again. Derrock got up, turned off the radio, and answered. It was Edgar Lloyd.

'Is that you, Rock? Can you lend me a hundred?'

‘No. What for?’

Lloyd was in a room at the Viceroy Hotel, in a poker game with two commercial men from Montreal. For once his luck had failed him. He had lost all he had, and would have to quit a loser unless Derrock could help him out.

‘If you’ll write a cheque I’ll send up a messenger to get it.’

‘No. Wait a bit. I’ll come down to you.’

Derrock was thoroughly awake now, and he was glad of the diversion. Otherwise he might have had to go on thinking about his story. He got out his car and drove down town. It was just after midnight; and the down-town district was quiet. The theatre crowds had gone home. Most of the plate glass was dark, except for a lunch-room here and there, and the lights of the night ticket office of the Canadian National Railway.

But when Derrock reached the hotel room he found that he was hardly needed. On his credit, Lloyd had secured a fresh supply of chips and was winning back. The room was blue and choking with smoke and close air. Glasses were on the table, and bottles stood on the floor near the feet of the players.

Derrock took a drink, and then bought a stack of chips, though he knew that he had no business in this game of experts. In fact, he got no cards; he had to play cautiously; he did not win nor lose much.

But Lloyd was winning now, and Derrock now saw a new Lloyd. He had never before seen Lloyd practising his arts over a card-table, where he was reputed always to win. He saw a new man—no longer the critic and philosopher, but the hard-boiled sport. Lloyd had taken off his coat and pulled back his cuffs. He laughed and jested and told brief indecent anecdotes while the cards were being shuffled. He seemed to play without attention. He drew and bet almost without looking at his cards. He might have seemed trying to lose his money, yet the chips were piling up in front of him.

The game did not last much longer, for the Montreal men had to catch early trains, and wanted to go to bed. There was a round of jack-pots. The last pot went round many times before it was opened, and then everybody stayed in. Drawing to two pairs, Derrock found that he had a full of aces and queens, and he raised the opener. Betting went for a round or two, and then the Montreal men dropped out, leaving it between Lloyd and Derrock. Confident in his aces and queens, Derrock raised another five dollars.

‘And another five, Rock!’ said Lloyd, laughing.

There was about sixty dollars on the table when the hand was called.

‘Full house,’ Derrock said, laying down his cards.

‘Sorry, Rock! Four deuces.’ And Lloyd raked over the chips.

The accounts were adjusted and paid, and Derrock and Lloyd went downstairs and out to the car.

‘What do you want to do now, Rock? Suppose we have something to eat.’

It was what Derrock wanted, for he had had no dinner. He ought to go back to his rooms, but he hated the idea of facing his story. They had plates of ham and eggs and coffee at a lunch-counter, and went back to the car again.

‘Where’ll we go now?’

‘We might go for a breath of air—a brief spin.’

They drove eastwards out of the city, past the race track, and for several miles into the suburbs, and came back the same way. It was two o’clock on the dial of the city hall tower when they stopped once more at the corner of King and Yonge Streets. The great bell struck two ponderous reverberating notes, and then the cathedral played its plaintive hymn:

O Lord our God,
Be Thou our Guide;
And by Thy power
No foot shall slide.

Beside them loomed the tall mass of the Canadian Pacific Railway building, all dark now; and the squatter mass of the Canadian National Railways building, equally dark but for the one lighted window of the night office. Opposite was the Bank of Montreal, and opposite this again was the Board of Trade, all deep in darkness. Here, if anywhere, beat the great heart of Toronto. But now that mighty heart was lying still.

‘Dear God, the very houses seem asleep!’ said Lloyd, crossly. ‘This is the deadest place in the whole world, after one o’clock. What’ll we do now, Rock? It’s only the beginning of the night.’

Four ways, the pavements stretched pallid and deserted under the electric glare. At rare intervals, the night trams rattled by, with nobody on

board. Nobody was on the pavements. In the distance a motor car seemed to slink surreptitiously away.

‘Isn’t anything going on anywhere? Don’t you know of another poker game?’

‘No, I don’t know of anything,’ said Lloyd after reflection. ‘Even the morning newspaper men have gone home. Well, we might go out to one of the road-houses, where they run a crooked crap game and charge us a dollar for a drink. Or we might try one of the frat. houses, but the chances are that everybody’d be in bed. What a town! Now if we were in Vienna or Seville, there would be any number of cafés and joints of all sorts . . .’

‘And in San Francisco they’re just beginning the evening,’ said Derrock. ‘In London, some of them are getting up. In Shanghai . . .’

‘Anyhow, I know where we can get a drink,’ Lloyd said. ‘Drive over to McCaul Street, Rock, and stop where I tell you.’

Derrock had plenty of drinks in his room, but he did not want to take Lloyd there. It would mean all the rest of the night. They had just had drinks at the hotel, and he didn’t know why Lloyd wanted another.

However he drove to McCaul Street and stopped where Lloyd told him. It was a respectable, semi-detached brick house, where a little yellow light showed through the closed blinds. Lloyd rang the electric bell in a peculiar way, several times, and an electric bulb blazed out over the door, lighting them strongly. A man looked carefully through the glass of the door, and then opened it, a stout man with a black beard and no collar.

‘Don’t leave that damned car standing right in front of the house. Move it along a little, can’t you?’ he said.

Derrock moved the car fifty feet, and came back into the small dim hallway of the house. A faint reddish light burned in the hanging hall lamp. At the right was the parlour, dim with the light of a single orange bulb. It was crammed with furniture, dimly shimmering with shiny oak and brown plush. Two silent men and one woman sat there, all holding glasses, and they turned their heads away to avoid being recognized. Further down the hall another door led into the dining-room. It was almost filled with a table covered with a red fringed cloth and a sideboard decorated with painted plates and vases of artificial flowers. Here under the dim glow of an orange bulb sat two women and one man, all holding glasses, not saying anything, and they turned away their faces as the newcomers passed.

Derrock and Lloyd saw these revels through the open doorways as they were led along the hall and into the kitchen. Here a flaring gas-jet revealed the linoleum floor, the greasy table, the gas range and the sink. A short, dark, fat woman met them here, and she looked at them with undisguised contempt and suspicion.

‘What do you want?’

‘What have you got?’

‘Rye.’

‘Well then, let us have some rye.’

She opened a cupboard under the sink, and from among the brushes and scrub-cloths she produced a bottle without a label.

‘One dollar.’

Derrock paid. She poured out the brown liquor as if it were an elixir of gold. After the first sip Derrock put water in his rye, but even then he had to drink it slowly, as if it were boiling hot instead of being merely corrosive. A faint sound of voices came from the illicit roysterers in the front rooms.

‘Want any more?’

‘No.’

‘This way out, then.’

She unlocked a side door and let them out into a dark lane. Emerging from these sepulchral orgies Derrock felt a strange dangerous sense of intoxication, and as if a colony of red ants had established themselves in his stomach, and were crawling rapidly up his spinal column toward his brain.

‘Let’s have another breath of fresh air after that.’

Speed was the thing to wash the poisons out of the system. Derrock drove rapidly west and then north, going up to sixty. He had a dim idea of trying to make ninety, realizing, however, that his ideas at that moment were not reliable. But the streets were all empty. You could have made a speedway of the whole city, and nobody would have been a penny the worse. He turned south again, and stopped as before at the corner of King and Yonge Streets, as the city hall clock began thundrously to strike three. The eternal return! The serpent biting its own tail!

Four ways the empty wastes of pavement stretched. The dark business buildings towered up in the white electric glare. The big clock thundered;

and then up in the eastern sky the cathedral played its thin and sweet melody:

In every hour
Be Thou our guide . . .

‘What’ll we do now, Rock?’

‘We might have something to eat,’ said Derrock, who was getting very exhausted and empty, and would have liked to go to bed.

‘Good God, Rock!’ Lloyd cried passionately. ‘Here we are, two young sports with our pockets full of money, ready for any devilment, and is there nothing for us but to eat ham and beans at a lunch-counter?’

‘Well, if we were Regency bucks we would go up St. George Street wrenching off the door-knobs and knockers, fight the police, spend the rest of the night in the cells, be fined in the morning, and feel that we had got our money’s worth and were devilish Corinthians.’

‘But there aren’t any door-knockers any more, Rock. Nothing but electric bells. And you can’t wrench off a door-knob. It’s screwed on far too tight. Did you ever try? Those Regency bucks must have been muscular boys, or perhaps the door-knobs were fastened on differently in those days.’

‘Well, we might sit here in the car, and I’ll match you for quarters. Or we might go to bed.’

Lloyd looked as if he didn’t know the meaning of the last expression. He never went to bed before four o’clock, and not then if he could find anybody willing to stay up with him. A policeman went by and observed them suspiciously, taking the number of the car. They might be bandits, waiting for the zero hour.

‘The classic, the traditional thing to do would be to go to a bawdy house and finish the night there.’

‘That’s all very well, and I approve it in principle, as the diplomatists say when they don’t mean anything. But I’m not a classicist, Rock; I’m entirely a romanticist, a revolutionary. Besides, it’s far too late. All the whores are asleep. Even the madam is asleep after counting up the takings. If we tried to get into a disorderly house at this hour we’d be arrested for disturbing the peace. But I know where we can get a drink—real Scotch this time. I should have thought of it before.’

At Lloyd’s direction, Derrock drove along deserted streets into Manning Avenue. Before reaching Bloor, he stopped. Lloyd got out and went to the

house, where a faint glimmer of light showed.

After a long delay the door opened and a man appeared, a big, dark, unshaven man in a bath-robe and slippers.

‘What the hell do you want?’

‘What have you got, Jack?’

‘Get t’hell out of here! Nothing doing this time of night.’

‘Damn him anyway!’ Lloyd said when they were back in the car. ‘I’ve taken a lot of money into that fellow’s place. What’ll we do now, Rock?’

‘Nothing for it but a bit of speed. Speed is the thing to wash the poisons out of the brain.’

But Derrock did not feel like speeding now. He drove north, up Yonge Street, up to the top of the hill above the city, and stopped. From that elevation they could see over the whole of Toronto, out to the dark horizon of the lake. The city glowed like an electric field of force. Through its silence they heard the great municipal gong thundering the hour, but they could not hear the plaintive voice of the church.

There was a deadly chill in the air. It was the hour when healthy persons are asleep, when the sick are awake, when wounded men die. Vitality burned at its lowest. Derrock felt tired and sleepy and miserably depressed, but Lloyd seemed to be just waking up.

‘What’ll we do now, Rock? If you’ve got anything to eat in your rooms I believe we could do with it. There’s a lot of the night left yet. I don’t have to be at the office before nine o’clock.’

Derrock surrendered, and drove back to his apartment. They went upstairs, and he looked for something to eat. He could find nothing but a lump of brown bread, and a hunk of very old Canadian cheese.

But Lloyd made coffee, putting it on the electric grill in cold water, half a pint of coffee to a quart of water. It frothed up; he added a little more water; let it froth again, and then let it boil a quarter of a minute.

He poured two inches of whisky into a tumbler and filled it up with the coffee, hot, black and strong as lye. Drinking this formidable mixture and eating lumps of hard cheese, he enunciated the most criminally subversive doctrines of morality and literature. He would have made obscenity a standard. He demanded the entire abolition of everything except of certain French poets. Atrocious phrases flowed from his lips.

Going still further—or coming back—he advocated an iron censorship to restrain the Puritan from corrupting the natural immorality of youth.

‘Do you not think, Lloyd,’ Derrock said, ‘that Canadian art has lately become quite surpassing, especially with respect to cheese. Not many years ago our domestic cheese resembled nothing so much as a pale immature rubber; but now Canadian Stilton is almost as good as the English article, and, in fact, is generally sold under that name.’

‘Undoubtedly, Rock. I find it excellent. But in Utopia nobody is allowed to write unless he can write like Landor or Addison; nor to paint unless he can paint like Ingres or Alma Tadema; nor to read unless he is capable of understanding it; nor to think at all unless he is capable of thinking as straight as—well, say, as you and me. And these prohibitions are backed up by the most terrific government tests, which nobody can possibly pass. In consequence of these wise arrangements, the people of Utopia are enabled to lead perfectly healthy lives; and they spend all their leisure in prize-fighting, wrestling, and playing at games of chance, or in drinking, dancing and the pursuits of sex.’

‘But do these prohibitions not result in considerable boot-legging?’ Derrock inquired sleepily.

‘Of course they do, Rock, and in much moonshining, which is much more important. Since all writing, reading, painting and thinking are practically prohibited under heavy penalties, nobody dares to practise them unless he is forced by the most absolute personal necessity. But as these necessities do exist, they are much practised, though there is no money in it, except for the middle-man. The secretly-produced books and pictures are conveyed by adroit bootleggers to the illicit connoisseurs, and sold for fabulous prices. The book of poems which here sells—or rather, does not sell—at a dollar and a half, is there eagerly snapped up at fifty dollars a dozen. The writer does not get the profit, to be sure, and frequently he is imprisoned for long periods and put to extreme tortures. But it does not discourage the others; for they work under pressure of their own inward necessities, and they work under such conditions of freedom as exist nowhere else in the world.’

Charging his glass again with coffee and spirits, Lloyd enthusiastically described the underworld art-life of Utopia. In cunningly-contrived workrooms like the ancient hiding-holes of priests and patriots, the poets and novelists worked feverishly, driven by their own spiritual necessities, and stimulated by freedom, by secrecy and by deadly peril. Almost

anonymous, and without hope of gain, and without any restrictions of convention or tradition or morality or reality or truth, they dealt solely with the material of their own imaginations, producing huge and iridescent creations of pure genius. They wrote of appalling crimes, of ghastly revenges, of fabulous generousities, of superhuman aspirations. The Elizabethans were nothing to them. They wrote of love and were able to express its divinity and were not afraid to describe its humanity. Their books were solid with exact science, incandescent with poetry, explosive with life—with the real life, the inward life, the only life anybody could know. They wrote of Promethean struggles and tortures, of Luciferian disasters, of obscenities and adorations; they wrote of God and the Devil. Secretly printed on underground presses, these books were bootlegged to the secret drunkards of literature, and sold at a hundred dollars a dozen. It was the same thing with the painters. In ill-lighted studios, obtaining their colours with the utmost difficulty, the artists produced works that resembled nothing in the world, and yet seemed to resemble everything that had ever existed. They painted pictures of their own inner lives, portraits of people they did not know, landscapes that could exist only in the craters of the Moon. Driven solely by their own spiritual necessities, time was nothing to them; and they spent years in perfecting a single point of technique. Like Aristodorus the Utopian painter, who was commissioned to paint the portrait of Cleantha, the mistress of the Tyrant of Syracuse, whom he had never seen. But by an assemblage of straight lines and converging planes he conveyed such a criticism of the whole of feminine nature that Tyrant cast his mistress into the streets, and confined himself ever afterwards to homosexuality.

Derrock, however, did not hear a word of it, for he had fallen asleep in his chair. Perceiving this at last, Lloyd stopped talking, and looked at him with an expression of mingled contempt and affection. He finished his drink, mixed another, and went quietly to the bookcase, where he took down a volume of Shelley. He returned to his chair and began to read the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', reciting the lines to himself in an undertone, in a voice of religious reverence. But about the middle of the poem his voice failed, for he, too, had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

Carrying about five dollars' worth of roses, Derrock climbed the flight of stairs and knocked at the black-painted door of Erma's studio. She opened it this time. She opened it more promptly than usual and she seemed more pleased than usual to see him. He thought she looked a little pale. Her hands were quite clean; she did not have her apron on, and she did not seem to have been painting.

'I've got it, Erma. It's done at last. Here it is.'

'What have you got, Ford?'

'My story. The manuscript. "Cold Blood".' He held up the brown paper package. 'I really thought I never was going to be able to finish it, but I've done it. I've spent the whole summer on it, but it's done at last.'

Erma looked at him, at the paper packet. She took the roses, quite joyfully and affectionately.

'Oh, Ford, I'm so glad you've got it done! We must have a drink, to its success.'

She brought out the rum and ginger ale, and mixed the sweetish fizzy beverage that Derrock didn't much care for. Erma lighted one of her little cigarette-like cigars and put a log on the low fire. It was rather chilly in the studio, for the summer heat was over, and the garage people below were economically delaying to turn on the steam.

'I was up nearly all last night with it, for I was bound to get done with it to-day. I really couldn't stand having it on my hands any longer. I want you to come out with me while I put it in the post. I think you'll bring it luck. And then we'll go for a run in the car, and come back and have dinner somewhere and go to the show. This is the day we celebrate.'

'I'd like it awfully, Ford. And I'm sure the story will be a great success,' Erma said, looking at him affectionately.

'No, it won't be any success. The readers of *Danger* will simply gulp it down and go on to the next. They won't even notice who wrote it. But it'll bring in two or three thousand dollars. Perhaps you might call that a sort of success.'

'I expect it's a much better story than you think, Ford.'

He shook his head. He knew all about that. It hadn't turned out at all as he had hoped. It wasn't in the least like Stendhal. It wasn't even much like Rider Haggard. But it was probably quite up to Larry Donovan's literary standard. It would bring two or three thousand dollars; and Derrock looked forward to the nightmarish future of producing three or four novels like this annually. Ten thousand dollars a year! But what was ten thousand dollars?

Erma was looking rather pale and used-up, he thought, rather as if she had been staying indoors far too much. All this latter part of the summer he had seen her only two or three times. She had had one or two violent working fits, and then relapsed into nothing. She hadn't finished the 'Chimaera'. Neither of them had ever spoken of her visit to his rooms on the race day; but Erma's manner seemed softer, much sweeter, almost as if she had done him some wrong, and wanted to make up for it.

Once lately she had lunched with him, but he had been far too busy for anything. In two months he had driven his car hardly five hundred miles. He hardly knew what had become of that summer. It had all gone somehow in writing the 60,000 words of 'Cold Blood', and he didn't like his story in manuscript at all. He certainly wouldn't be able to stand it in print. But he had the plot of another one almost worked out, a really Haggardian plot this time; and this time he was positively going to cut out everything but pure story quality.

He would have to coarsen his technique and speed up, but it was an immense relief to get this story done. He had been up nearly all the night, and had worked steadily at his typewriter nearly all day, taking only a bite of lunch in his kitchenette. He wanted to show it to Erma before he mailed it—not that he wanted her to read any of it; but he wanted to show her the flat package that was worth more than its weight in silver. It would be rather easy money after all—now that it was done.

'How's the "Chimaera" getting on?'

'It isn't getting on at all.'

She had worked at it violently, a week at a time, but Derrock couldn't see that she had made much headway. It was growing dusk in the studio, for the afternoon was late, and the early winter twilights were coming. Hardly more than the dark outline of the figure showed on the tall canvas. Thus blurred, he could imagine it exactly as it existed in his mind and in Erma's—the beautiful, tense figure, full of ecstasy and torture, hugging the beast that was eating into her heart.

After some hesitation, Erma turned on the powerful spotlight, and the picture sprang out into brutal clearness. She had painted in all the drapery, now a wonderful mass of colour, all deep purplish-reds and greenish-blacks, contrasting and blending with the deep flesh tones. She had not done much with the chimaera itself. It was still a fizzly blur; and she had painted out the woman's face altogether, and it was a blur too.

'I'm awfully tired of it, Ford. I've been working hard all summer, just as you've been working. But it isn't like your book. It'll never be a success.'

'You're trying for something much higher than I am, Erma.'

'If I am, I'm a fool. I'll never be able to finish this picture. I think I'll give up painting.'

He looked at her, startled. She had never spoken like that before. Give up painting! He knew that she could as easily give up breathing.

'Of course you're tired of it, Erma. You've been sticking at it far too long. You must give it a rest. Put on some warm things, a heavy coat, and we'll go and post my manuscript, and then we'll do something to stir us up a bit.'

She went to put on her warm things, for motoring was going to be chilly that day, in Derrock's open sports car. She seemed rather glad to get out of her studio, and she locked the black door, putting the key in her pocket. They drove first to the central post office, where Derrock posted his package, insuring it for a hundred dollars, for it was almost worth its weight in gold.

'Wish it luck, Erma!'

'Oh, I do! But my wish couldn't bring anybody luck.'

She brightened up, however, when they had got clear of the streets, and were in the open country, going west. Her face, which had been looking rather haggard and starved grew flushed with the air and speed, and she began to seem really pretty, nestling down in the cockpit, between the fur of her collar and the brown hat-brim. The sun was going down, clear and windless. The day was over; summer was over. There had been sharp frosts already, and little pools by the roadside were still edged with ice.

'Let's take a week off now and amuse ourselves, Erma. Winter is coming. We shan't be able to take many more drives like this.'

Erma hated the northern winter, and so did Derrock. Farther north still, where there was continual snow and ice and frost from November to April,

it might not be so bad. But in Toronto the streets were slushy, icy, dirty, piled with dirty snow, thawing, freezing, freshly snowed upon, while bitter winds swept down from Lake Huron. He would have to lay up the Jupiter. You needed a good closed car for winter driving; and anyhow there wasn't much fun in frozen radiators and batteries, and hard starting, and trying to steer a skidding car over ice and snow-drifts. He had always wanted to go south for the winter, but his business had always prevented it. But now there was nothing to hinder. He could carry his business with him, and with his typewriter and a box of paper he could make twenty dollars a day anywhere; and besides he could always be in touch with the market.

'Why don't you go away for the cold months, Ford? Why don't you go to that fabulous place with the poetical name that you discovered, in Oklahoma?'

'I was just thinking of it. Will you go with me?'

She laughed and shook her head, looking flushed and pretty.

'I don't believe I'd like Oklahoma. Can't we go a little faster?'

Derrock speeded up a little, but cautiously, not to risk another summons. Next time they might take away his permit for a whole year. He turned off the paved highway into a country road and went north for a few miles, and then turned west again. All the fields were growing brown and dark, and the light was fading out of the sky. On every side the farms were settling to rest. There was a sound of voices, of dogs barking, of cattle lowing to be milked, of teams being put away. At a side road that looked good he turned south again. After a few miles a light shot across the road ahead. A distant horn hooted. Another light shot past, with a rising, diminishing roar. They were coming back to the main highway again.

Derrock stopped a hundred yards short of it, and they sat still in the car. It was almost dark, and stars were beginning to show. Trees grew on either side of the road, and at the left there was a little valley, heavily wooded with beeches.

'Let's get out and walk a little,' Erma suggested.

Derrock dimmed the lights of the car, and they went into the beech woods. There was a sort of road, a farmer's trail through the trees, overgrown with grass and covered with fallen leaves. The beeches had lost half their leaves in the early frosts and they were still falling. Continually the leaves slipped off and fell heavily without any wind, as if loosened by the coming of the night. It reminded Derrock of the arty stuff Jerry Mertens had

read to him about death in Vallombrosa—the silver and the scarlet and the shudder and the whisper of death. But there wasn't any silver or scarlet here, nothing but deepening brown and darkness.

They sat down on a big log beside the trail, and Erma nestled close to Derrock, shivering a little. He put his arm around her, and she drew a deep, shivering sigh.

'I think I'll give up painting, Ford.'

'Don't be foolish, Erma. You don't mean it for a moment. What would you do?'

'What does a woman do, who has no trade and no money? And no friends?'

'You can always count on me, Erma.'

She nestled a little closer to him and put her cheek against his shoulder in the heavy coat. He squeezed her a little closer, protectingly, reassuringly. He really had a great affection for Erma. He would rather be with her than with almost anybody. He would do almost anything for her. It was nonsense for her to talk about giving up painting. She could paint better than anybody in Toronto, but she had grown sore and stale. What she needed was a change.

'You're very good to me, Ford, and I'm awfully fond of you, though you mightn't think it. But I wouldn't let any man help me unless I could give value.'

'You can give value enough, Erma. The "Chimaera" is good enough. I'll buy it from you as soon as it's finished. But you must finish it. If you can finish it as you've conceived it you'll have a masterpiece, a creation.'

'I'll never finish it now, Ford. I don't think I ever ought to have tried to be a painter. I think it was all a mistake.'

'No, you're an artist, Erma, but you're stuck in the worst possible sort of place. A half-grown provincial town is the worst possible sort of place. You might be better in a village, like Jerry Mertens. It would be a lot cheaper, anyway. But you can't work in entire solitude, unless you're a great genius like Michelangelo, who is said to have worked at sculpturing in the dark. And in the really big city it costs so much to live that you've no time to think of anything else. And you can't work among barbarians altogether, unless you're a great genius like Gauguin, who preferred to paint cannibals. And in the half-grown city you get drawn into the local movement, you get

to adopt the half-grown standards, until you begin to believe that if you could learn to paint as well as Wellington London you would be the greatest Toronto painter in the world, and that it would really matter if you were.'

But Erma said nothing at all, and Derrock drew her still closer to him and continued to moralize.

'A really big city is all right, for you can have some peace there, except that you can't think of anything but how to make enough money to cover the heavy expenses. I think perhaps a village like Old Lowlands where Jerry Mertens lives is the best, except that you have to live in entire solitude, and you can't go on for ever spinning webs out of your own brain. But anyhow, I'm certain that the hustling prosperous half-grown city is the very worst of all, with its circle of local great men. They all have them—Toronto and Buffalo and St. Louis and Seattle—eminent artists of all sorts, whose names, however, are not much known outside their own municipalities. Who is the great poet of North Dakota? I'm sure I don't know; but you may be sure that there is one, and that he wears an immense local halo.'

Leaves were falling, dropping on their shoulders, but not at all as Jerry had described it. They fell down straight and heavy like flakes of metal, brown blurs in the dusk. Erma rubbed her cheek against his sleeve.

'I'm not clever enough to philosophize about it, Ford. I don't care anything about the big city, nor the village, nor the local arty crowd. I only wanted to paint.'

'Of course, and you are painting.'

'No, I'm deadly sick of the whole thing. My very stomach turns. I feel as if there was a change coming to me.'

Derrock looked at her affectionately in the gloom. He was awfully fond of Erma. He would rather be with her than with anybody else, except when she was tormenting herself about her painting. And sometimes he thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She would have to give her work and herself a rest for a while. She must try to be happy. He must think out something.

'Of course there's a change coming to you. It's just what you need, just as I told you. I felt like that before I sold out my decorating business. Let's go away, Erma. You don't like the winter here, and neither do I. We'll go to some place where it's warm, where we both can work.'

'I've no money, Ford.'

‘I’ve got a thumping account in the bank. I might have had a lot more if I hadn’t sold out my Cuban Gas. It’s been rising ever since. Then my story will bring in two or three thousand at least. I’ll sell the car. We’ll have lots of money.’

‘For Paris—for Italy?’

‘No, not that sort of thing at all. Not any of those arty places.’

‘You’re not thinking of Hawaii and the lure of the South Seas?’

‘Heavens, no! What do you take me for? Stevenson and Jack London. Hula-hula—ahoha! No, I mean something quite different—something on the other side of the world—Singapore, Seville, Shanghai—anything beginning with an S. I don’t really know. We’ll have to talk about it.’

‘But aren’t those half-grown cities, too, about the size of Toronto?’

‘Perhaps, but they’re Utopian cities, where the populace doesn’t read or think. They spend their whole time healthfully in drinking, fighting, dancing, gambling, and the pursuits of sex. You don’t run into the arty stuff at every turn. I think Seville might do for a start, while we consider where to go next. Goya is your real master, Erma, and you ought to study his stuff a bit. I don’t believe you’ve ever seen any of his etchings. Neither have I. I’ve got another novel thought out, and I can make any amount of money as long as Larry Donovan is editor of *Danger*.’

‘But you mustn’t spend your life at writing dime novels, Ford.’

‘What, you’d call *The Devil Deals* a dime novel? A two grand novel, Erma, and I’ll do better than that next time. And anyhow, dime novels are all right. Melodrama is the stuff. Life is like that—all love and hate and ghosts and terror and intoxications and sudden death. My new plot will be a stunner, and I’ll write it in Seville. We’ll both work hard all winter, and spend our leisure healthfully in dancing and playing at games of chance, in seeing the bull-fights and strolling in the orange groves. In the spring we’ll come over by Paris and London, and have a shot at the big picture dealers with the things you’ll have painted. We’ll make some money. This is the right idea, Erma. You can’t get to be a great artist by sticking in a half-grown city, Erma, in an overgrown tank-town.’

Erma laughed, with the old cussedness back in her voice.

‘Is this a proposal of marriage, Ford, or are you trying to corrupt my virtue?’

‘Whatever you like, Erma. I’m game for anything.’

‘My dear, it’s tremendously sporting of you, but do you really think we’d hit it off together? I don’t believe we would. Not even on the other side of the world. Let’s go back to town now, and have something to eat. I’m getting awfully hungry.’

He let her go from his arm, and they stood up. Erma suddenly looked up at him with a queer, pathetic expression, as if she were going to cry. Her eyes looked very big, and without saying a word she clasped him around the neck and pulled his face down to her in a long, close kiss. It was the only serious kiss that Erma had ever given him, and he staggered with the shock of it. She didn’t say a word, but let him go again, and turned along the farmer’s trail towards the road.

Suddenly what had been dimly half-conscious to Derrock became clear. He had been in this place before. This was where he had come with Doris, on that hot night after the races and the dance. Back there, behind that thicket, was where they had gone. The sudden memory of that night of speed and sweetness still further staggered him. He wondered if Doris had been here again too. He hadn’t seen her since that afternoon at the hotel tea-room.

‘What’s the matter, Ford? Aren’t you coming?’

He followed her out to the road, and they got into the car. In silence he drove to the highway and turned towards town. It was near the dinner hour, and not many cars on the road. Summer was a long way back, he thought, and he didn’t want to recall it. Far better to think about a sunny winter.

‘Remember, Erma, it’s all settled. You must finish your picture, but first we’ll take a week’s holiday. We’ll speed the car a bit, dine, dance, drink and go to the show, while the “Chimaera” stands with its face to the wall. Then you’ll get a new model, and make a dash at it with a fresh mind. I know you can do it, and I’m buying it from you for two thousand. I swap my story for your picture. I’ll take it to New York, and I expect to sell it again and clear a large profit. You’d better arrange at once about giving up the lease of your studio, for as soon as the picture is finished we book our steamer passages.’

Nestling down in the cockpit, Erma looked up at him and laughed gently.

‘You’re always a decorator, Ford.’

‘Why not? It was time for a little decoration, a little melodrama. Erma’s life seemed to be getting rather dull and drab, though perhaps it did not seem so to her. Derrock steered the Jupiter up the highway towards Toronto, deep in reflection. There was not much traffic to watch, for it was a slack hour, and the crowds of summer tourist cars were gone.

He was driving rather slowly, thinking deeply, and wheeled into a rather sharp left turn. A row of trees hid the turn. From the opposite direction burst an enormous car going at terrific speed, blazing with chromium and electricity and blinding headlights like a bolt of death. It failed to take the curve. It shot straight across the road. Derrock hardly saw it except as a blur. It was all a flash and a crash. He felt as if his bones were blown to pieces, and the Jupiter seemed to go right up in the air. Derrock made a frantic vain snatch at Erma, and was shot out headlong into a whirl of smashing machinery.

Almost immediately—he thought—he recovered himself. He was lying face down on the roadway, in a strange silence, after that explosion of lights and rending of glass and steel. There were no cars anywhere. He struggled up, and saw a red tail-light disappearing far down the highway. But he couldn't see his own car anywhere. He couldn't see anything clearly, for he was dizzy, and something was clogging his eyes, mud or blood. That loose door, which had never been set right, must have saved him. He had fallen through it instead of going over with the car. Peering about, he dimly saw the bulk of the Jupiter upside down in the ditch, but nothing of Erma. He jumped into the ditch and found her. Her head and shoulders protruded from under the car, which was lying right across her body. He could not move her, and she would neither stir nor speak. He tugged to shift the immense weight of the iron machine—hopeless!

Suddenly the road seemed to flame with lights. Cars were stopping. Men were crowding down, asking questions, trying to help, and more cars kept stopping. A string of men got their hands under the Jupiter and heaved, lifting it enough to let Erma be hauled out. She was covered with blood and mud and filth and engine oil, and she did not show any sign of life. Derrock tried to feel her pulse, could not find any.

‘Is there a doctor here?’

There was no doctor. Not that it mattered now, for Erma was certainly dead. Derrock sat holding her head in his lap, and he could not detect any breathing nor any heart-beat.

People, more and more, swarmed about like flies, in the white glare of the meeting headlights. A traffic policeman roared up on his motor cycle. He took everybody's name and number and address. He asked Derrock about the accident, and Derrock hardly knew what he said. It had been all a flash and a crash.

‘Must get her to the hospital.’

‘My car’s right here. Get her into it.’

‘No, not the hospital. Church Street,’ Derrock mumbled. What was the use of taking her body to a hospital? All he wanted was to get Erma back to her own room, to her own bed, out of the crowd, out of the eyes of the helpful, excited, eager crowd, swarming like flies to the scent of blood.

Carrying her between them, two or three men placed her on the back seat of a big car, and Derrock crouched beside her, holding her body from slipping as they raced back towards the city. His eyes were blurred with continually dripping blood, which he mopped off with his handkerchief till it was a soaking rag, yet he did not feel any pain anywhere. He had the car stop at Erma’s studio, and they carried her up the stairs. Derrock got the key out of her pocket, and opened the door, and turned on the light; and as they were carrying her in she moaned a little.

She wasn’t dead! They took her into her bedroom. It was hard to get her out of her heavy coat. Her hat had been lost, and her soft hair wavered like smoke around her head. Her clothes were soaked with blood and oil, and somebody pulled the coverlet and sheets from the bed, and they laid her down on the bare mattress. She lay with her eyes shut, and moaned again in a hoarse, guttural way, not human.

‘There’s a doctor coming right away,’ a voice said to him. ‘You’d better get him to fix you up too. Just look at yourself in that glass.’

Derrock looked in Erma’s glass and saw that one side of his face was a mask of half dry blood, with fresh red trickles dripping from it. Yet he did not feel any pain. He washed it off in Erma’s bathroom; he mopped it with a wet towel; and he washed the dirt from Erma’s face.

The crowd of helpers seemed to have vanished all at once. Nobody was there. But Erma did not move and she lay with her eyes shut, and nothing but that hoarse monotonous moaning, as if there was no life left in her but pain.

All at once the doctor was in the studio with his black bag, as if he had been conjured up out of nowhere. He was a very young doctor, hardly more than a boy, and trying hard to be grave, but clearly elated at having a serious case, perhaps the first serious case he had ever had. He looked solemnly at Erma, felt her wrist, lifted one eyelid, very grave and professional, but his eyes danced.

‘Can you get hot water?’ he said. ‘A lot of hot water, and a pair of large sharp scissors. I haven’t anything large enough with me. All her clothes will

have to be cut off her.’

There was a gas plate in Erma’s tiny kitchenette, but no kettle to hold more than a quart. Down in the garage, however, he was able to get bucketfuls of boiling water, and he carried it up to the doctor, who had his coat off and was efficiently at work. The doctor knew his business.

A policeman suddenly appeared in the studio, tall, helmeted and imposing. The highway cop must have telephoned. There would have to be an inquiry and, Derrock was required to give all the details of the accident. He didn’t know any details. It had all been a flash and a crash. He didn’t know the number of the car that had struck him, nor its make, nor who drove it, nor who was in it. He knew nothing at all; but the policeman, immensely imposing, took down everything that he said.

After the policeman had gone, the doctor came out of the bedroom.

‘I suppose we should have taken her to a hospital,’ Derrock said. ‘I thought she was certainly dead. Ought we to do it yet?’

‘Oh no, not a bit of use,’ said the boy solemnly, with an elated face. ‘No use at all. She’s just as well where she is. It’s quite hopeless, I’m afraid. She’s terribly injured. Of course, I can’t tell everything with only this superficial examination, but I can see quite enough. There are severe abdominal lesions, besides the head concussion, and crushing of the chest. And then, you know—in her condition . . .’

He hesitated and looked at Derrock.

‘Are you her husband?’

‘No, I’m not her husband. She isn’t married.’

The young doctor examined Derrock again with curiosity, seemed about to say something, and checked himself.

‘Well, in any case, I’m afraid it would be quite hopeless. It’s really wonderful that she lived long enough to be brought here. They couldn’t do anything for her at the hospital except give her a hypodermic, and I’ve done that. She isn’t in pain now, at any rate.’

Derrock heard all this without the slightest emotion of surprise, too numbed to feel any emotion at all.

‘How long may she live?’

‘Impossible to say. She might go at any moment. She might last twenty-four hours.’

He looked at Derrock critically, professionally, with eager eyes.

‘Are you going to stay with her? You’ll want a nurse, won’t you? I’ll send one up right away, and I’ll look in again a little later. I think I’d better fix you up a bit, hadn’t I? You look rather battered.’

Derrock had several cuts on his cheek and temple, and a deeper one just at the edge of his hair, still bleeding. The boy sponged and dressed these wounds quickly and expertly, closing them up with strips of plaster.

‘Sure you’re not hurt anywhere else?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘You’ll probably feel something more in the morning. I’d advise you to go home, take a very hot bath and go to bed. You really can’t do any good here. The nurse will attend to everything. Perhaps you’d better get in touch with the lady’s family or friends, if you know them.’

Derrock didn’t know anything about Erma’s family or friends, nor whether she had any. She had never spoken of them to him. He looked into the bedroom. Her shoes and stockings were lying on the floor beside the bed, with a pile of dirty, oily, hacked-off clothing. She was lying on her back, covered up to the chin, with her eyes shut, not moaning now, but breathing with a harsh rasping. Her face was bluish and pallid in spots. Her skin had fallen into creases, and she looked horribly ugly, and Derrock’s heart melted into affection and agony and a tearing sense of rebellion and helplessness.

It was getting very cold in the studio, for the fire had almost gone out. He built it up again from the little store of wood and coal that Erma kept in a sort of cubbyhole at the top of the stairs. He felt shaken and sick and terribly faint and empty, for he had had no dinner, and only a bite of lunch in his rooms while he hurried to finish his story. He could have gone out to a lunch-counter, but it didn’t occur to him as possible. A drink would have been salvation; he would have given almost anything for a drink; but he could not have brought himself to take out Erma’s rum bottle from the cupboard.

He huddled over the fireplace, trying to get warm, and the nurse arrived. She was middle-aged, rather pretty, immensely efficient, and she knew all about the case already, from the doctor. She took off her coat, straightened her blue and white uniform, looked at Erma and noted her pulse, very grave and professional. She looked at Derrock rather compassionately.

‘Were you going to stay all night? It isn’t at all necessary, you know. I think you ought to go to bed. You look awfully used up, yourself.’

Of course he was going to stay; there wasn’t any question about that. So the nurse had nothing further to say about it, but she thought she would like a cup of tea, rather strong.

Derrock put the kettle on the gas plate and boiled it, and made the tea; but he couldn’t find anything for the nurse to eat. He had always suspected that Erma ate hardly anything when she was alone. There were various expensive delicacies, bottled olives, anchovies, tinned lobster, pickles, even caviare, but no sort of normal human food except some rather stale biscuits. He carried the tea and the biscuits to the nurse, and she settled herself in a comfortable chair by the foot of the bed.

‘You’d better try to get some rest yourself, for there’s no use at all in your staying awake. Have you notified her relatives or friends?’

Derrock felt that he must try to find out if there were any. There must surely be letters, addresses, names or references of some sort about the studio. He drank a cup of tea, but could not eat the biscuits. He opened Erma’s desk, a cheap flimsy affair, with a hinged shelf that let down to make a writing surface, and pigeon-holes above it. But most of the pigeon-holes were empty. Erma rarely kept letters; she generally burned them. But almost the first thing he found was a large envelope addressed to himself.

He tore it open. Erma had made her will. It was not long, and was written out on plain foolscap in Erma’s peculiarly childish scrawl. At the end he noticed that he was himself appointed sole executor. He hardly read through the body of the document, which was written without any attempt at legal phrasing, but plain and straight, as Erma always did everything:

‘. . . all the contents of my studio and apartment to Wallace Weatherford, broker, of the City of Toronto, with the exception of . . .’

It was properly signed and witnessed, and was dated about two months back.

He replaced this document in the desk, too numb to feel any emotion of surprise, and continued to look through the pigeon-holes. But there was nothing of what he sought, no letters, no addresses. He found a number of illegible pencil notes, some receipted bills, several dried-out tubes of colour, a broken paint-brush, a paper of pins, a roll of silk, and an envelope containing four ten-dollar bills. Perhaps Erma hadn’t any relatives, any friends.

He looked into the bedroom and saw the nurse sitting comfortably in the rocking-chair, having drunk her tea. Erma still lay on her back with shut eyes, as he had last seen her, but breathing differently now—two or three harsh, choked breaths and then a long halt, as if she would never breathe again, and then the choked rasping breath.

He went back to the studio and built up the fire. He turned out all the lights but one bulb. He felt terribly used up, wrenched apart, aching, trembling, and faint with hunger. But it didn't occur to him that he might go out to a restaurant; it didn't seem possible to leave the studio.

It was a noisy corner. The Church Street trams rattled a hundred feet away, and the cars and lorries, and there was a perpetual coming and going of motors in the big garage down below, loud talking and shouting and the sudden roar of raced engines. He wondered that Erma had ever been able to sleep there; but you could get used to anything. Somewhere in the far distance a bell struck mellowly; and then the cathedral spire played its plaintive hymn tune, trickling down through the night with the faint weary sweetness of an old music box:

In every hour
Be Thou our guide,
And by Thy power . . .

Then the shattering boom from the City Hall clock drowned it, only a hundred yards away. Nine strokes. What sort of god, he wondered, was speaking from that holy spire. It was no god, but the voice of man, rebelling against ignorance and destruction, asking to be put wise, and grown weary with asking it so long. But it still got no answer, but the thundering crashes from the municipal tom-tom.

The doctor looked in again. He looked in at Erma; he talked for some time in the bedroom with the nurse. He inquired of Derrock about Erma's name, about his own name and address; and Derrock realized that he was thinking about his fee, in this important but rather unusual case.

He longed to smoke, but found that he had no tobacco. Erma's painting-table, however, was littered with bits of the little cigarette-like cigars that she always smoked—whole ones, half-smoked ones, charred butts. He found a whole one and lighted it, lying back in the long easy-chair where Erma was accustomed to sit and study her picture. In the dim light the easel and its picture was just a blur. The night was growing more quiet, fewer lorries, fewer swift cars. In the bedroom Erma continued to breathe with that hoarse rasping, stopping, starting again, sounding distinctly through the whole

apartment. Derrock shut his eyes, feeling terribly weary and bruised and shaken, yet incapable of rest. Quite consciously he realized that he was dozing without resting, while all the events of the day rushed uncontrollably back over him, all in a distorted high-strung key. His treasure story, worth its weight in gold—the purring speed of the Jupiter—the darkness and sweetness of the beech woods—the dark falling of the leaves—the shudder and the whisper of death—Seville and sweetness—and then he leaped awake, trembling with an impression of shock like a collision.

It was the thundering boom from the City Hall bell. Between its crashes he heard the cathedral playing its faint and ineffectual tune:

Be Thou our guide . . .

‘And put us wise’, his mind added automatically, fitting the fox-trot words to the tune. The big clock continued to thunder. Eleven strokes. With astonishment he discovered that he had been asleep for nearly two hours, but he felt none the better for it, but more aching, more weary than ever. It was dim and still in the studio. There was hardly any noise from the garage downstairs. Still he could hear Erma’s harsh, discontinuous breathing, but it sounded a little more subdued. The doctor had said that she wasn’t suffering now. Derrock looked through the door, and the dozing nurse glanced up alertly.

‘Hardly any change,’ she said.

Erma was lying on her back as he had seen her last, covered to the chin, her eyes shut, and breathing with that heavy halting rasp. But she wasn’t in pain, the doctor said. He had given her a shot of something that had ended the pain. If she was in pain, she didn’t know it; her brain was numbed. It could be only her soul that was in pain now, and there was only one thing that could end that.

Outside, the city seemed to have become very quiet. It was a dead place after midnight, Lloyd said. Derrock felt terribly stiff and bruised and empty. The doctor said he would feel worse in the morning. He thought vaguely of making a hot cup of tea, or maybe cocoa. There surely would be cocoa. And perhaps the nurse would like some too; but the effort was beyond him. He lay back in the chair again and shut his aching eyes. Every sort of torturing picture flickered through his brain, fast and flickering like a bad cinema. Death was the crucial point of the whole thing, after all, he thought. It was all that gave any meaning to life. He opened his eyes and looked at the easel and the ‘Chimaera’. It was a blur. The face was painted out, but in the gloom the blur was lost, and he could see the picture as Erma imagined it—the

beautiful tense figure straining the deadly beast to her heart. He put more wood on the fire, for it was cold as death in the studio, and in the warmth he sat and dozed again. The crash of the great bell penetrated his mind faintly. Almost constantly he seemed to hear it, harsh and discordant, with occasional stops. He awoke suddenly to hear it resounding in his ears. Three o'clock. He could still hear Erma's breathing, but it seemed slower and quieter now, and perhaps she was resting more easily. There was a lot of the night left yet, he thought drowsily, a considerable span of life for Erma yet. He meant to get up and look at her, but he felt weighted down, leaden and sore. He couldn't move himself from the chair. Darkness flowed over him again, heavily and painfully. He awoke again with a start, but there was nothing to startle him this time, no striking bell, and he was astonished to see a pallid light coming through the window. He looked at Erma's clock. It was nearly seven, and he had been asleep for hours.

But now he could not hear Erma's breathing. Perhaps she was better; perhaps she had been asleep; but he feared to look. He felt terribly faint, terribly empty and sore, and chilled to the soul. He went to the bedroom door. The nurse was dozing, but she looked up alertly.

'Yes,' she said. 'About two hours ago. You were sound asleep, and there was no use waking you.'

Erma was lying on her back, covered to the chin, just as he had seen her last, but she wasn't breathing now. The nurse had tied a white cloth under her chin, knotting it on the top of her head, to keep her jaw in place while she grew rigid. Her face wasn't either beautiful nor ugly any more. It wasn't even Erma—it was painted out. Derrock stooped and kissed her forehead—not that he wanted to, but it seemed somehow required of him; and at the movement of his approach her silky hair rose and waved on her head like smoke, around the white bandage.

He went out into the studio and looked at the teddy bear, and a tearing sense of cruelty and horror, of helplessness and rebellion went through him, making him sick, doubling him up like a physical pain. The nurse came out and looked at him compassionately.

'You really must go away now and get some rest. You look nearly dead yourself.'

The young doctor had been quite right when he said that Derrock would feel worse in the morning. He felt worse than he had ever felt in his life, not only exhausted with hunger and fatigue, but bruised and aching all over. His chest, his shoulders were sore; he could hardly raise his arms. His eyes

ached, his brain was numb, and he felt absolutely drained of life. There would have to be an inquest, he understood—all sorts of hideous formalities.

‘The doctor will be in again very soon. He will see about the death certificate. There’s absolutely nothing now that you can do, unless to see about an undertaker. Do you know any?’

Derrock didn’t know any of the burial men, whatever they called themselves. He always looked the other way when he passed their gruesome shops.

‘There are several mortuary parlours not far away, just over on Yonge Street. Some one is always there on duty, day and night. They will send their people over, and see the coroner and the police and attend to everything.’

Derrock found his hat which, like his clothes, was smeared with blood and engine oil. He brushed himself as well as he could, and went out to look for a mortuary parlour. After that, he thought he would get something to eat.

CHAPTER IX

Derrock unlocked the black-painted door and let himself into the studio, afterwards locking the door behind him. The place seemed bare and desolate in the cold light from the big dirty window, disorderly and lost and somehow inhuman, and horribly cold. The chairs, the easel, Erma's painting things were all exactly as he had left them a few days ago; but everything looked different; and it was strange to think that, for the time, he was the only person on the surface of the earth who had any rights in that studio, since Erma was no longer on the surface.

It was not merely his right to be there, but it was his duty. It was his job as executor to sort out and inventory the things in the rooms, especially any valuables, and deliver them to Wallie Weatherford, and take his receipt. Everything had been left to Weatherford, except that the books were to go to Derrock himself, with a sum of fifty dollars 'in payment of a loan'. That must have been the fifty he had given her after his killing on Infernal Coke. He hadn't meant it as a loan and he had almost forgotten it, but Erma was scrupulous about those things. All the pictures went to Weatherford, with the exception of the 'Chimaera', which the executor was instructed to burn in case it should be unfinished at the time of her death. Everything else went to Weatherford, and Derrock wondered what Wallie would do with it all.

He hadn't seen him yet, for Weatherford was out of town at the time of the accident, and did not appear to have yet returned. Derrock had written to him formally, and telephoned his office, but they said he was in Chicago, and would not be back for a week. He had not come back even then, not in time for the funeral. Derrock had failed to discover any of Erma's family or friends; and he followed her coffin to the cemetery alone, and saw Erma put into the earth without any assistance except from the professionals.

It was horribly cold in the studio, with a seizing penetrating chill, so that he could not take off his overcoat. There had been no fire there lately, and the garage people had economically turned off the steam heat, as the studio was not being used. The weather had changed too. It was heavy and cold outdoors, with huge flakes of wet snow falling straight down, melting into slush as they fell, clogging the glass of Erma's window. Down on Church Street the crowds went by, wet and snowy, carrying umbrellas, and cars went by scattering torrents of slush from their wheels. Winter was coming, but Derrock would not have to think about laying up his car, for he no longer

had a car. The Jupiter had been hoisted out of the ditch by a wrecking crew and towed back to the city. It was terribly mangled, all demolished on the collision side, the engine loosened from its bed, the hood driven in, the radiator smashed, the steering gear ruined, and the whole frame racked asunder. Possibly it could have been reconditioned into running order, but Derrock felt that he would never want to drive it again. Nor any other car. So he accepted the first offer from a wrecker, and the Jupiter, having fulfilled its destiny, passed out of his world.

He looked into the cubbyhole where Erma kept her store of fuel, and got out what wood and coal was there. The supply was almost exhausted yet there would be enough. He built up a blaze in the brick fireplace and stood over it shivering, looking about the familiar room that had turned strange and somehow sinister. It was going to be a terrible business to inventory all these things, he thought not knowing exactly what his duties required of him. The painting-table was littered with brushes, rags, tubes of colours, oil-cups, and the little cigarette-like cigars that Erma smoked. In a desultory way he picked out the full tubes from the emptied ones, and put them into boxes. The broken tubes he put into the fire, where the lead melted down, and queer greenish and yellowish flames began to flicker up. He brushed up the litter of old cigar-stubs around Erma's easel. A dead heaviness of spirit possessed him. Never in his life had he felt less equal to a job like this.

He looked into Erma's kitchenette, at the gas plate, the few pots and pans, the cups and saucers, and the pots of olives, anchovies, caviare, without any normal human food. Perhaps Erma didn't need any human food. Probably there was nothing of any particular value in the whole place, unless it was the pictures, and he didn't know where Erma had stored them. She never hung them on her walls. The only picture in sight was the 'Chimaera', standing with its face to the wall, as he had placed it the morning she died. But at that moment he didn't want to look at it. He went to the door of the bedroom, stopped and looked in, with a feeling of intrusion.

The bed had been covered up neatly with its white coverlet and pillows, and the heap of oily blood-stained clothing had disappeared. He didn't know who had done that; perhaps the nurse, perhaps the undertaker. There did not seem to be much in that little room, not much to inventory. Erma's soiled painting apron hung behind the door, and a row of shoes of different sorts stood against the wall. There was a flat steamer trunk, but it was locked, and he had not the key, though the key must be somewhere about. On the bureau there was very little toilette apparatus, few brushes and pots of paint. Erma

used such things only in her profession. There was a tray of not very costly rings and pins, but the rings that Erma usually wore were still on her fingers. Opening the top drawer he discovered a tangled mass of handkerchiefs, gloves, ribbons, bits of silk, all sorts of rubbish; but when he poked to the bottom he came upon three Government bonds of \$100 apiece. This was all the capital he had found, for there appeared to be no bank-books, and nothing but the four ten-dollar bills, and a little silver in Erma's purse. There might be valuables in the locked trunk, but he didn't feel like breaking it open. At the very back of the drawer, however, he found a box containing a piece of jewellery like a large pin or brooch, he didn't know what to call it, of heavy gold set with four good-sized diamonds. He had never seen Erma wear it, and it looked as if it might be valuable, if the stones were genuine. Very likely Wallie Weatherford had given it to her. It was just the sort of thing he would give, like a lump of cash.

The other drawers of the bureau were full of clothing, dresses, slips, stockings, underwear, put away with a neatness that surprised him. He probed down to the bottom of one drawer, but there was nothing but clothing. He gave it up. He wasn't going to rummage through Erma's things for improbable valuables or papers. Let Weatherford attend to that. There was a dead, clutching cold in that bedroom, and he went back to the studio, where the fire was beginning to show some effect.

He took off his damp overcoat and stood over the blaze, trying to get rid of that unearthly chill. The pictures were the important thing, but he had no idea where Erma kept them. There must be some, for she had worked at painting here for years. She worked on a canvas for weeks, and then it disappeared. He had no idea what she did with it. But he was sure that she didn't sell it; and he began to realize how little, after all, he had ever known about Erma in anything. One small side of herself, one little warm facet she had shown him; but for the rest, her existence had gone out into incalculable ways, into non-Euclidan dimensions. More than all, it had gone into her pictures; and these seemed to have vanished, perhaps into some fourth or fifth dimension of space, for anything he knew.

He found them, however. They were hidden, quite simply, under the bed. It was a large brown paper package, wrapped and corded closely up, all the pictures that Erma had wished to save. He took them out to the warmth, and, unwrapping them, found more than a dozen canvases of different sizes. All had been taken off their stretchers, and each had an inch of bare smudgy canvas around the edge, full of tack-holes. None of them was very large, none nearly as large as the 'Chimaera', and he remembered having seen

most of them before. But now he looked at them with new eyes. He spread them about on the floor and looked at them.

He was in no state of mind to criticize them, any more than he could have criticized the cut of the clothes in Erma's bureau. But the clothes were dead, and never had any life apart from Erma; but these pictures were still alive. They were the essence of years of work. They were the essence, he knew she would say, of her whole life. There were landscapes, portraits, figure studies, but hardly any of them quite completed; for Erma had never been quite able to finish anything. Her ideas were always a little beyond her powers of execution. One was a portrait of Erma herself, which she must have painted before a mirror. It was far from finished; it was hardly even begun. It was perhaps the work of a single morning. But somehow she had managed to catch that flame of vitality, as of something burning up strongly within her, that she had in moments of enthusiasm. She must have painted this in a moment of enthusiasm, and had never been able to recapture that first mood, and so she had put it away to be finished at some other time. What had become of the scores of other pictures that she had painted or attempted in all these years. Burned, very likely; for Erma knew a poor thing when she saw it, and she didn't keep dead lumber.

But none of these seemed as good as the 'Chimaera' had promised to be. Derrock went and turned the big picture around and looked at it with the others. In the cold, snow-clouded light from the window all its strength, all its weakness stood out sharply. The drapery, the legs were magnificently painted, yet the thing didn't hold together. It wasn't in the modern idea of painting anyway; it never would have been a success; it was too literary. The face was a blur; it couldn't be done. Erma was an artist who had never learned to paint, except as she learned it from herself, in moments of excited ecstasy. But that sort of learning took a long time. The moments of ecstasy didn't come often, and Erma hadn't lived long enough.

Outside, the big snowflakes fell heavily and monotonously, not melting so much now, beginning to whiten the streets. Inside the studio it was like a separate world of cold, a place half removed from reality, in some special dimension of space and time. The burning colours in the grate sent up spurts of blue and orange, crimson and scarlet. Leaning back in Erma's chair, Derrock looked at the canvases lying about the floor like islands of colour. They were like vivid, detached fragments of Erma's own spirit. Erma was dead; but these hot vital facets continued to sparkle, and would continue as long as the good English colours lasted. He wondered what Wallie would do with these pictures. Still they glowed, though Erma was out in the frozen

cemetery, out in the absolute zero of interstellar space. Perhaps by this time she had been put wise. It was even conceivably possible that she had been made happy, though all the theologies were dead against it. Heavy in all his soul, he gazed at the pictures that were the vital essence of Erma's whole life. He couldn't imagine Erma anywhere but here, in this work-place, where she had attempted some desperate transaction with life and art. Surely if the spirits of the dead ever came back, if they ever spoke, it would be in such a place as this. Weary and superstitious, he lay back in Erma's chair, with all his spirit strained to listen. There was no answer, only the silent glowing and sparkling of the burning colours, and the silent glowing and sparkling of Erma herself, roughed in with few strokes, but glowing with some sort of internal combustion.

Wearily Derrock gathered himself together out of his mystical, his superstitious daze. He gathered all the canvases together into a pile again. Weatherford would have to dispose of them. But for himself, his duty now was to put an end to the teddy bear, to that 'Chimaera' that had tortured Erma to the very end. It was superstitious, of course, but he couldn't help feeling that if she could have finished the picture she would be alive that day. With a sharp knife he cut the canvas clean out of the stretcher and laid it on the floor. Thus imperfectly seen, he was able to imagine it again as she had wished it. Finished, it might have been a philosophic drama, a masterpiece of creation; but she never could have finished it. Erma wasn't in the least philosophical, and women were never creative in that way. As a general thing, men weren't creative either. He knew that he wasn't creative himself, but at least no chimaera trafficked in his heart.

Sick with regret, with rebellion, Derrock sat by the fireplace and looked at the teddy bear. A heavy noise reverberated through the studio, a heavy knocking that startled him and sent a cold crawling down his spine. A silence, and then it knocked again. It was at the door. He opened, and saw Wallie Weatherford, wet and whitened with melting snowflakes.

'I thought I might find you here,' said the broker.

He came in, shaking the snow from his hat, and looking about him with a disconcerted air, as if things were somehow different from what he had expected.

'Yes, I looked for you,' Derrock answered. He had looked for no such thing, but now it seemed to him to be the inevitable event.

'You'd better keep your coat on,' he added. 'It's cold here.'

‘Cold! God, I’ll say it’s cold!’ said Wallie, and they looked a moment at one another, both caught in that freezing chill.

‘I’ve been detained in Chicago,’ Wallie went on. ‘I didn’t know anything about this till after I got back. I was terribly grieved—it was a great shock,’ he said conventionally, looking rather hard at Derrock. He offered his cigar case, which Derrock refused.

‘It was a horrible affair. I understand your own car was wrecked and you were badly cut up yourself. I suppose they never found out who ran into you?’

‘They found the car in the ditch next morning, near Hamilton,’ Derrock said. ‘It was a stolen car, taken from Toronto the day before. There was no clue to who drove it. I wasn’t able to see anything. Sit down, won’t you? It’ll be warmer in a moment.’

He put more fuel on the fire, and lighted one of Erma’s little black cigarettes. He had not the slightest feeling of animosity for Wallie. Instead, he felt a queer sort of affinity, and he looked at him, intensely curious, trying to imagine what Erma had found in him.

‘It doesn’t matter now, anyway,’ he added. ‘I suppose you got my notice, about the will. Nearly everything here is left to you, you know.’

‘Yes, so your letter said. I don’t know what she did it for. I don’t want the things.’

He looked about the studio with an almost aggrieved air, and then glanced at Derrock again.

‘I dare say you know . . . I suppose you’ve guessed how the situation stood?’

‘Yes, I know all about it,’ said Derrock, heavily.

‘Yes, I rather thought she’d have told you. I rather expect you were next in line! It’s just as well that you’re wise to it. But I don’t want her things. I’m sure I wouldn’t know what to do with them.’

What indeed would Wallie Weatherford, the high spender, the speeder, do with Erma’s few sticks?

‘Well, my business is to hand them over to you,’ Derrock said. ‘I don’t know why she left them to you. But Erma never took anything without trying to give back value, as far as she could.’

‘She never took much . . . not from me.’ Wallie glanced at the pile of pictures curiously, pulled them aside a little, looked at the ‘Chimaera’, and drew it over to see it better. He gazed at it for some time.

‘No, not much. Hardly enough to live on, even in this dirty attic. It wasn’t my fault. I offered to finance her for a regular artistic campaign, with the finest studio in Toronto, and all the money she needed. I believe it would have paid. But she wouldn’t take it. Said she wasn’t a bluffer. But I expect you have to be considerable of a bluffer to put the art game across in this town—or anywhere else. Don’t you think so?’

‘I do,’ said Derrock. ‘But Erma was an artist, and she didn’t know how to bluff.’

‘Eh?’ said Wallie, a bit puzzled. ‘Well, I don’t know anything about pictures, but it always seemed to me that she was about as good as Wellington London or any of these famous fellows. I don’t know why she never seemed to be able to make any hit. Now that big picture there on the floor . . . that’s something that always got hold of me, though it’s only half finished. A pity she couldn’t have finished it. I was going to buy it. Now I’ve been wondering if I couldn’t hire Wellington London or somebody to paint in the face and the other parts that she didn’t do.’

‘I’m instructed to burn this picture,’ Derrock said. ‘Almost everything here is yours, but this one still belongs to her.’

‘I’ll give you five hundred dollars for it.’

Derrock shook his head. He poked up the fire, which was burning badly. He rolled the ‘Chimaera’ up loosely and put it on the embers. It crackled and smoked, refusing to burn, and he sprinkled it with turpentine from the tin on the painting-table. Then the canvas caught and burned up into a smoky flare, roaring up the chimney, dying down, leaving the stiff cindery roll, the blackened corpse of the picture, with brilliant streams of green and orange sparks flashing across it. He poked it to pieces, and it fell into cindery ash. Smoking impassively, Wallie watched the destruction with a gambler’s face.

Derrock went into the bedroom and brought out the bonds and the piece of diamond jewellery.

‘You’d better take charge of these at once. I didn’t find any other valuables, but you may come on some more when you go all through the stuff.’

‘God, I don’t want those things!’ said Wallie, recoiling. ‘You keep the bonds. They’ll go toward the funeral expense. You paid that, didn’t you?’

And then you're entitled to executor's fees. I don't know anything about that brooch thing. I never saw it before. Maybe it came from Geoff Arlington; it's just the sort of thing he'd have given her. He came ahead of me, you know—about a year or two, I'd think.'

'What?' Derrock cried, really startled this time.

Geoffrey Arlington was a financier above Wallie's class, the head of Consolidated Bonds, and Derrock had met him only casually. But he had an instant mental picture of the promoter of Consolidated Bonds, dark and handsome, always so darkly handsome and smiling. Many men and women had fallen for him. But not Erma!

'Didn't you know that! I thought you'd know all about it. Well now, how did you suppose she's been living all these years, doing nothing but painting, unless somebody was paying her way? She hadn't any money that I know of, and she never sold any pictures as far as I know, except to me and Geoff Arlington. I don't see why she shouldn't have sold, but she never had any gift for salesmanship. All the same, I believe she was just as good as Wellington London or any of the rest of these arty fellows. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, she was a great artist. And sometimes she could paint finely,' Derrock said at last, heavily.

'Eh?' said Wallie, puzzled. 'Well, I don't know anything about that, but I certainly liked Erma awfully. You'd better keep that diamond thing and sell it toward general expenses. It's worth some money. If there's anything else here that you'd like, I wish you'd take it. It seems that I'm the sole heir, and I don't know what to do with the junk.'

Wallie was looking at the canvases piled on the floor. He looked about the bare, desolate studio; he got up and went and peeped into the bedroom, but did not go in.

'Gad, this is the sort of thing that makes a man almost sick of life!' he said, surprisingly. 'Oh well, we might as well have a drink,' he added.

With a manner of familiarity he went to the cupboard and got out Erma's rum bottle, with the ginger ale. He poured out two tumblers of this sweetish, fizzy beverage, swallowed his own, and poured himself another.

'She never would drink anything but this stuff,' he complained. 'I wanted to send her up the best Scotch, or wine, for that matter. But she wouldn't have anything but this rum, the cheapest stuff on the list. Of course, maybe she liked it. Women don't know anything about drinks. And

she wouldn't have a car either. She could have had a Cadillac. But she wouldn't have it. What do you know about that?'

'Maybe she thought she couldn't give value.'

'That was my look-out. She could have given value, right enough. I'd have done almost anything for Erma,' continued Wallie, growing a little mellowed with his drink. 'I'd have seen her through anything. She didn't need to worry.'

'I don't believe she did worry, not about that.'

'I hope not. She'd no reason to. I'll tell you, Derrock, what was the matter with her. She ought to have had a child. It would have done her all the good in the world—given her something to think about besides her paint work; for I tell you, Derrock, that I believe that was all she ever cared about. It wasn't natural.'

No, it wasn't natural, Derrock thought; but Erma wanted to be creative in only one way. And you couldn't have it both ways.

Wallie sighed and looked at the pile of canvas on the floor. He poked them slightly apart with his toe.

'I don't know what the devil to do with all these things,' he complained. 'I wish Erma had left her pictures to somebody else. I've no place to put them, I live at the hotel you know. I've got one of her pictures hanging in my office now, in a frame. I don't suppose these are worth anything . . . I mean, they wouldn't bring any money in the market. What would you do with them?'

'I couldn't say. They're yours.'

Wallie poked them over again with his toe, and drank rum.

'I don't believe any of these is as good as the big one you burned.'

Derrock said nothing. Wallie looked at the pile a moment longer, and then rolled up the topmost canvas and put it on the coals. It flamed up at once with a scorching smell of oil, and red and bluish and yellowish flickers rushed over the surface like the scared spirits of the colours. Wallie watched it burn, and then put a second picture on top of it. He poured more rum for them both and drank, and Derrock drank with him, without any animosity, but full of a weariness too great for rebellion.

'Yes, I was always awfully fond of Erma,' said Wallie, growing still more mellowed and regretful. 'She was about the best company I know,

sometimes, when she wasn't worrying about her painting. She always was ready for a motor drive or a dinner, some little fun. And sometimes I used to think she was about the handsomest woman I ever saw; and then again she didn't seem so at all. Don't you know what I mean?'

'Yes,' Derrock said. 'She was a very beautiful woman, and sometimes she looked it.'

'Exactly,' said Wallie. He sipped his drink and looked regretfully at the pile of paintings on the floor. Rolling another up, he placed it on the fire.

'Yes,' he said, 'she was handsome, you're dead right. Lola never was really in her class, though I guess most people would have put it the other way. I think I'll have to cut loose from Lola. She's a little too much of a devil, Derrock. But I expect you know all about that. Well, that's all right; I don't mind. But there's nothing very restful about Lola, is there? And I'm a very busy man, and the day is a good deal more important to me than the night. The market's very uncertain just now. Are you doing anything with it?'

'No, I haven't been in the market for a long time.'

'I remember you made quite a hit on Infernal Coke because you thought you had a straight tip. That was rather a joke on me. I dropped about twenty thousand on Coke that day. I don't think we'll see much more action in Coke for a while.'

'Lloyd thinks the whole list is bound to go lower.'

'Of course. He always thinks that. But I would expect the next movement to be in Cuban Gas, or else in Minnesota Silk.'

'So Lloyd thinks. He's short on Silk . . . I don't know how much.'

'Not very heavy, I expect. And I think he's on the wrong side at that. Lloyd'll never make any money. He hasn't the capital to cut his losses and double his winnings. You've got to expect to lose about as often as you win at this game, but you've got to fix it so that you win more than you lose. Not that Lloyd hasn't got wonderful judgment sometimes—seems as if he could tell exactly when the turn was coming. I've made money sometimes by taking his advice. And then again, other times, he'll talk to me about poetry over the ticker, like as if he was in another world, till I don't know which side of the market I'm playing. He's made me lose thousands that way, I expect. All the same, I like Ed Lloyd, but he ought to be some kind of professor. He's too good for the money game.'

The room was full of the smell of scorching oil and paint, and swarms of orange sparks raced over the cindery rolls in the fireplace. Wallie poked them into ash, and put a couple more pictures on the embers. The warmth was grateful, for there was a chill like death in the studio.

‘No, I never knew anyone quite like Erma,’ said Wallie sorrowfully pouring drinks again. ‘Now I expect that Lola has had about ten thousand out of me last year, one way and another, and Erma never had quarter of that, and yet Lola isn’t in her class at all, for looks or brains. But Erma never was a trader, and that’s a fact. I wanted to take her to Miami this winter. I’d have let her stay till spring if she liked it. It would have done her good. But she wouldn’t go. I’d have done anything for Erma, but she wouldn’t let you do anything. There was a hard shell around her that you couldn’t get through. I’ll tell you what was the matter, Derrock. She never really cared a hoot for any of us . . . only for this painting of hers, and she never made much out of that, now did she?’

He took up the next canvas, turned it to look at it a moment, and then placed it on the fire.

‘Seems rather a shame to be burning up her pictures this way, but what can you do? I’d bet she’d rather have them burned right up than have them shoved around from one storage place to another, till finally they got put out with the garbage. Don’t you think so?’

‘I’m damned sure of it,’ Derrock said.

The next picture on the heap was Erma herself, the merest rough sketch, but, as Derrock thought, with something very alive in it. Wallie looked at it critically.

‘Don’t look much like her, does it?’

‘I’ll give you five hundred dollars for it,’ Derrock said.

Wallie studied the picture again for some moments.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I guess this one belongs to me.’

He put it on the fire. Derrock watched it burn without regret, even with a sense of relief. Wallie piled all the rest of the canvases on top of it. The fireplace smoked; a gust of oily smoke burst into the room, and then the pile caught fire and roared up the chimney.

‘If I were you, I wouldn’t touch the New York market for a while,’ Wallie said. ‘It’s very uncertain, wobbling up and down. Chicago grain is a gamble. I think there’s a bull movement coming, but you can’t tell when it’s

going to start. Do you know, last spring I offered to carry five hundred Quebec Steel for Erma, just when the rise was starting. She'd have made ten thousand out of it, the way it turned out. But she wouldn't have it.'

'Did you offer it to Lola?'

'You bet I didn't.'

'I don't think I'll play the market again,' Derrock said.

'I expect you'd be wise. But I never yet knew anybody to quit the game as long as he was ahead. If you ever do feel like taking a chance again, just drop in and see me first, and I'll tell you anything I know. We might as well finish what's left of this,' he added, pouring out the rest of the rum. 'No use leaving it to be wasted.'

They drank together. Derrock felt not the slightest animosity toward the broker, but only a queer sort of brotherhood. The canvases in the fireplace were dying down into black cindery ash, and he poked them up into a torrent of sparks. There was no more wood. Erma's store was finished. He took up the heavy stretcher that had held the 'Chimaera' and broke it up with his foot, and it made a hot blaze.

'I really don't know what the hell to do with this stuff,' Wallie complained, looking around the studio. 'I've no sort of use for it myself, and we can't leave it here, and I wouldn't send it to a junk dealer. I'll tell you what I'll do, if you're willing. I'll give you a general receipt for the whole works. That ends your legal responsibility, and then you can dispose of the stuff any way you like. Maybe you'd like to keep some of the things yourself. Anyway, I expect the charities or the Salvation Army would be glad to have them.'

'All right, Wallie,' said Derrock heavily.

Weatherford sat down at Erma's flimsy desk, got out his fountain pen, and wrote a formal receipt for the whole of his legacy. He handed this quittance to Derrock. He put on his coat and hat, and looked again, retrospectively, around the studio.

'Damned if this isn't the sort of thing that makes a man fairly sick of life!' he said. 'I'd have done anything for Erma, and I expect you would too. But she didn't care, Derrock. She didn't give a hoot for any of us—only for her painting, and a hell of a lot of good that ever did her.'

He went away, leaving Derrock alone, now the sole person on the face of the earth who had any authority there. It was growing dusk already in the

big room, with the early winter dusk, and the window panes clogged with wet snow. It had stopped snowing outside, and the streets were slushy and cold under a heavy sky, and the studio was choking with the heavy, sickly smell of burning oil.

He thought he had better telephone to the Salvation Army to come and get the furniture, or to the British Mission off King Street, that looked after the British immigrants when they had no work nor anything else. But no, he could not telephone, for Erma had no telephone in her studio. He would have to write a note.

He did not want any of Weatherford's legacy himself, except only the books, which she had left to him. There were not very many of them, and some of them he had given to her himself. She never read them. Erma wasn't in the least literary, but she liked little gifts. He took down the Swinburne he had given her, which she hadn't read, though she had listened when he read it to her; and he flipped over the pages:

Now all strange hours and all strange loves are over,
Dreams and desires, and sombre songs and sweet . . .

He read it with the same charmed feeling as he had read it first. He had an old-fashioned taste; he had never quite been able to get over Swinburne. The new ironic intellectual poets had never been quite able to destroy his pleasure in the purely mellifluous lines that Lloyd said didn't mean anything at all—but so sweet, so smooth, so cloyingly sweet that they cast a glamour over the most meaningless and the most unbearable things of life.

Sleep, and if life was bitter to thee, pardon.
If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to live.
And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.

Beautiful and meaningless sounds! Or if they had any sort of meaning it was something so naive that it would be despised by even the youngest of the intellectual ironists. He couldn't think that Erma could have very much to forgive. Men had always been good to her, but she wasn't a trader. She didn't know how to get value for what she gave. But she had had the immense luck to get out of it at exactly the right moment, and that was certainly a thing to give thanks for. If anything had ever been sweet to her—he didn't know; but he thought of that queer, silent, pathetic kiss she had given him in the beech woods, where he had gone with Doris.

The studio was heavy with the choking oily smell, and growing cold again. The pictures were all burned up. Nothing whatever was left of Erma, he thought with satisfaction, except the shoes and stockings and dresses in

the bedroom. It was a great deal better this way, he thought, for now there could not possibly be any bewildered spirit of the dead lingering about the studio, perhaps trying to speak, with no ear to listen. And he thought of Erma as perhaps a pale surviving flicker in the cold of interstellar space, out on the undecorated background of God's world. But more likely there wasn't any Erma at all any more, not what you could call Erma—only the dresses and shoes and stockings.

He sat down at the desk and wrote a note to the Mission. He had to put on his overcoat again, for in spite of the fire, there was a chill like death in the studio.

CHAPTER X

For a long time Derrock had thought nothing about his story, 'Cold Blood', which he had sent to *Danger*. His accident, and Erma's death had put everything else out of his mind. At last, however, he wrote to Larry Donovan, and waited for a reply.

His first story, *The Devil Deals*, had appeared in *Danger* in the late summer. Derrock read it with interest, with astonishment. He hardly recognized his own story. Large sections had been cut out, mostly what Derrock had considered the best parts; and large sections had been written in, not indeed in Stendhal's manner, but certainly exactly in the manner of *Danger*. Derrock was obliged to admit that it made a better magazine story than as he had written it. The re-write men in Donovan's office certainly knew their business.

He had no more ideas for melodrama, and didn't want any. Erma's death had shaken all that out of him. His own bodily shock, too, had taken a long time to subside. For weeks he felt sore and bruised; he felt half crippled, and wondered if he had not sustained some inward injury which the doctor had not discovered.

He looked for *Danger* on the news-stands, but did not find it. His news-dealer had not had it lately, and expressed a vague belief that the magazine was no longer being published. This was impossible, however. *Danger*, the biggest selling story magazine in the world! It could not possibly go under.

He got no answer to his letter, and the matter passed out of his mind. Remembering, he wrote again, waited ten days, still with no reply. He grew anxious and irritated; he wanted the two or three thousand dollars for his story; and he telegraphed.

This did bring an answer. But the envelope was not stamped with the red *Danger*; the letter was not signed by Larry Donovan, and, worse still, there was no cheque in it.

The letter-head bore the inscription *Motor and Home*, with the words in smaller letters underneath, 'with which is incorporated *Danger*'.

'Dear Mr. Derrock,

'We have your letter addressed to Mr. Donovan, formerly editor of *Danger*, and we regret the delay in replying, due to our

recent changes in management.

‘As you are doubtless aware, *Danger* has been discontinued as a separate publication, and is now incorporated in *Motor and Home*.

‘We are not now in the market for purely sensational stories of adventure. Our present requirements are for fiction of vital human quality, in a domestic setting, and with a strong, but entirely wholesome love interest. If you have anything of this sort to submit to us, we will be glad to consider it.

‘Our rates for such material are about a cent a word, or, for a book-length novel, perhaps \$800.00.

‘We hold your manuscript “Cold Blood” at your disposal, and will return it to you on receipt of one dollar for postage.

‘Charles Stuart Lakeside
‘Editor’.

Derrock read this letter twice over, with the sensation of a world collapsing. He had counted that story as safe as the bank. He had counted absolutely on Larry Donovan. And where was Larry Donovan now? Out in the cold, probably—out of a job. His programme of highly-paid melodrama hadn’t worked.

Derrock didn’t feel like writing a domestic novel at a cent a word. He couldn’t write like Stendhal, but he wasn’t even going to try to write like Harold Bell Wright. He would rather write like Rider Haggard if he could, or at any rate like Nick Carter. It would be rather fun to write like Nick Carter, he thought, without any restrictions of psychology or literature or style or reality or truth, just a jubilant uproar of blood and excitement. That was probably the real stuff! And there was a great public for such writing, but it was hardly likely that such stories would bring even a thousand dollars. He would have to coarsen his technique and speed up still further, if he were to make anything at that game.

He sat down in anger and wrote to *Motor and Home*, enclosing return postage for his manuscript. He might place it somewhere else; there must be plenty of magazines that wanted melodrama. He might get help again from Burlington Burton, the professional, who had so unerringly placed his first story. But it was a rather sickening business. It wasn’t so much the money; for he had plenty in the bank, but it seemed to involve the collapse of a whole system of life.

He had thought of going to Wellington London's studio reception that afternoon. He had received the engraved card; he had even got out a clean shirt in preparation, but this put him out of the mood for it. He lighted his pipe and sat down to think; and then got up and turned on the radio, twisting the dial till he got something that he liked, highbrow stuff, some sort of modern jazz symphony. The thunder of tom-toms filled the room, swelling into the tumult and torture of the brasses. There seemed plenty of that sort of thing going, that sort of musical melodrama. He had listened to it during all these nights when he couldn't sleep. He had slept badly ever since the motor accident and almost every night he would leap up out of a sound sleep as if he had been stabbed, sweating and trembling with an impending shock of collision, or else hearing the booming of that terrific bell that had counted Erma out.

Somebody knocked at the door.

'Damn!' Derrock said. But he shut off the radio, and opened.

'Good Heavens! Jerry!'

The bee-master came in, looking brown and strong and rural, very well dressed besides in a new suit and new hat, smiling, shy and stammering a little.

'How are you, Rock? I had to come to town on business. I've brought you a pot of honey and a bottle of hydromel. I hope I'm not disturbing you, Rock, am I?'

Derrock hastened to give him a drink. From living so much alone in the country, Jerry had grown encrusted with shyness and cloddishness, so that it took at least two drinks to bring him back to normal. He drank the Scotch and soda, and began to brighten perceptibly.

'How's your novel getting on, Jerry—the novel all about bee-keeping, and the silver and crimson of the falling leaves?'

'Slowly. In fact, it's not getting on at all.'

He finished his drink and took another, and his shyness began to fall away from him in flakes.

'You see, I haven't had much time lately, Rock. The last few months of the honey season were a dead rush. I had very little hired help. I had to take off the honey, truck it home, extract it and can it up. I got about fifteen tons of honey, and I must have lifted every pound of it at least ten times. Then I had to pack the bees away in their winter-cases, and feed sugar syrup to

some of them. I've been working all day long and too tired at night to read or write or think. I play a tune on the gramophone and go to bed. But it's all over now. The bees are packed away, and I won't have to see them again till next April.'

He got up, walked to the window and looked out at the wide view over the tops of Toronto. He looked curiously at the radio, and turned it on. A gay swirl of fox-trot music gushed out:

Where'd you get those lips?
Where'd you get those eyes?
Please make me . . . ?

'For God's sake, cut that off!' Derrock cried.

'I rather like that piece myself,' Jerry said, surprised, cutting it off. 'I've got the record of it at home. But you evidently have too much bloody good taste.'

Derrock said nothing. That scrap of dance air had startled and shaken him.

'I came in to see our honey co-operative people. I've just been down at the office, and got my cheque for the advance payment on my honey shipments. I'm full of money, Rock. I want to do something exciting.'

'How much did you get?' Derrock asked curiously.

'Well, this advance cheque is for \$1200. The rest of the money for the crop is paid in instalments, all the way up to next summer, when the pool is closed. I'll probably get about \$1500 more, and then there's beeswax and local retail sales of honey and all sorts of odds and ends.'

Less than \$3000 with all that labour! It was a sum which Derrock would expect to get for a single story that took only a few weeks to write, a sum that he might make in an hour on a right turn of the market. But Jerry seemed quite pleased with it.

'It's really more than I need,' he said. 'I can't spend that much in a year. It's very cheap, living in my village. When I come up to town for a few weeks it makes a difference, though. I say, Rock, you'd better come down to Old Lowlands and join me. I know where you can buy a good outfit of bees, all in working order, for less than \$2000. I'll teach you how to run them. You'd have a living assured, and more than half the year for reading or writing or anything you liked. We'd have a good time.'

Derrock looked at Jerry and almost laughed. That sort of life might be all right for Jerry, and there was a sort of picturesque and romantic air about the idea. But for him to take up such a laborious and ill-paid and peasant-like life—it was as if he had been invited to become a Mohammedan or a Japanese. He shook his head, smiling.

‘Not my forte, I’m afraid.’

‘I didn’t think you would,’ said Jerry unperturbed. ‘You have too much bloody good taste for that, haven’t you? But it would have been fun, if you’d liked the idea. But never mind. One thing I came to town for was to look for a new car—I mean a new used car. This is the time of year to pick up a good used car cheap. I thought I’d ask your advice.’

‘My car is smashed up.’ Derrock said.

‘Yes, I heard about it.’

Jerry sipped his drink, looked at him with a quiet, penetrating friendly eye, and was silent for a while.

‘But I believe it gave you good service,’ he resumed. ‘Would you advise me to get one like it?’

‘By no means,’ Derrock said. ‘That wouldn’t be the sort of car for you at all. I’d recommend a nifty little coop.’ *The Universe is a Motor*, he thought, *and all that men have thought, dreamed, done and been, and the essence of all science lies solely in the effort to avoid being run down.* The Philosophy of Escape.

‘I thought we might go around and look at some cars together,’ Jerry said. ‘I’m going to be in town for a week or so. You can’t possibly imagine, Rock, how refreshing the city is to me, after all the summer of country solitude and silence and hard work. I’m like a cowboy come to town. I’m Jack ashore. I want some dissipation. What have you got?’

‘Dissipation is purely a state of mind,’ said Derrock, pouring him another drink. ‘The easiest and cheapest, and perhaps the really most satisfying thing would be for us to sit here all the afternoon drinking whisky and listening to dance music on the radio. Or I’ll match you for quarters.’

‘No, that may be theoretically correct, but you’ve missed some obscure, vital point, Rock. Dissipation needs the collaboration of more than two people, unless they’re of opposite sexes. I believe it’s really a phenomenon of crowd psychology. Where is Edgar Lloyd? Have you seen him lately?’

‘Not for a week or so. But we’ll surely see him at Wellington London’s studio this afternoon, if we go there.’

‘Surely not. Why do you think so?’

‘Because you’d see everybody there, if you stayed long enough. This is London’s great day, the first of his monthly studio receptions for the winter season. He will exhibit his latest models. I’d rather thought of going myself. You might come along.’

‘Of course we must go!’ Jerry cried, delighted. ‘We’ll find Lloyd and take him with us.’

It was still early in the afternoon, too early to go to the reception, and they would be sure to find Lloyd among the brokerage offices. They took a tramcar down town. The weather had hardened, and a piercing wind swept down from the cold northern lakes. The car was crowded with people muffled against the cold—tired shopping people, harassed, wretched people, who would really be much better dead, and looking as if they were beginning to realize it themselves.

‘What do you think of the chance of immortality, Jerry?’

‘I wouldn’t think of it all. It’s quite enough to think of the chance of surviving the present physical death. I expect there would be quite a lot of rivers to cross after that. William James, who was perfectly hard-boiled, thought that the only way of proving survival is by actual experiment, and the psychical researchers do seem to have tapped a wire leading somewhere. They’re in touch with something outside us, it seems to me, but whether it’s the spirits of the dead . . .’

‘Or the gods.’

‘Yes—gods or elementals,’ returned Jerry, looking at him curiously. ‘That’s what the Church thinks, only she calls them devils. I didn’t know you were interested in that sort of thing.’

‘I’m not,’ said Derrock contemptuously. ‘He had forgotten that Jerry was a nominal Catholic. Spiritism! What sort of god would speak through a ouija board? he wondered. Yet why not through a ouija board as well as through a graven image or a baked wafer or a page of linotype? But the spiritists thought that the dead stayed around, hardly knowing that they were dead, thinking of their old work, their old companions. Derrock couldn’t believe that. The universe wasn’t so cruel as all that.’

They looked in at two or three brokerage offices, and finally found Lloyd at Wallie Weatherford's shop. The day's trading wasn't over, but it was a quiet day, and few customers were there, only the dozen regulars, shabby and unprofitable, sitting on the benches and watching the illuminated ticker tape. Lloyd was sitting in a corner, smoking and talking with Weatherford, and watching the price-writer, who didn't have much to do.

'Hello, Jerry! How are the bees?' Lloyd said, looking at Jerry with dislike and contempt.

'Hello, Lloyd! How is the market? Are you making anything?' returned Jerry, who knew the precise proportion of contempt and esteem in which Lloyd held him.

'The market?' said Lloyd vaguely, as if he had never heard of such a thing. 'I've got something here I've been keeping to show you, Rock—a translation I've made from Baudelaire. I don't think anybody has the right idea of Baudelaire, and of course he was a dead failure and has nothing to say to our generation . . .'

'If Lloyd is going to talk about poetry, let's go into my office,' Wallie said. 'I'll give you a drink.'

Lloyd still had his short interest in Minnesota Silk, convinced that it was going to break heavily. He looked for a crash, a cataclysm, but it had stood at a dead calm for weeks. The immensely over-extended bull interests seemed to be taking it easily. If it should fall five points Lloyd intended to pyramid his profits, and, once set rolling like this, it couldn't stop till he had cleaned up at least a hundred grand. But the thing wouldn't start to roll.

'It isn't going to break,' said Wallie, smiling at Derrock, whom he had not seen since they had settled Erma's affair at the studio. Wallie was looking rather tired, rather bloated, and at the same time haggard, as if the nights might be taking more out of him than the days.

He took them through the outer room where the bookkeepers were doing nothing, and the typewriters mostly silent. It was a dead day on the New York market. Derrock picked up the ticker tape. Silk was still at 85, and, drawing the long coils of paper through his fingers, he saw that it had moved little that day. Wallie opened a locker and produced a bottle and a syphon, and charged their glasses.

Suddenly over Wallie's desk Derrock espied the picture hung on the wall—a bare hillside, a bleak landscape with three trees, leafless, storm-blown, under a driving sky. For once, she had completely finished something,

varnished and signed it; and as Derrock looked at it he thought you couldn't possibly imagine that anybody but Erma could have painted it.

'I wasn't going to talk about poetry at all,' Lloyd said. 'I was just going to show Rock something. You wouldn't care for it, Jerry. Not your line at all. And you think Silk isn't going to break, Wallie! I'll bet you it does.'

'I'll bet you a hundred, even, that the next quotation is higher than it is now. I'll bet you two to one, Lloyd. What do you say to that?'

'I'll take you, Wallie. That is, if Rock will lend me a hundred. I haven't got that much on me.'

'I'd like to come in on that,' Jerry said unexpectedly.

Together they made up a pool of a hundred dollars and staked it against Wallie's two hundred. Silk was still inert. It had hardly moved for the last hour, and then only an eighth. Lloyd looked abstractedly at the tape, and rolled another cigarette.

'What I was going to say is, that sometimes a man strikes out an absolutely perfect idea—perhaps he never can put it into shape, or sometimes perhaps he can . . .'

The ticker began to chatter. Lloyd looked at the tape. Silk was up an eighth. The bet was lost.

'The whole trend is up,' said Wallie, with an expert smile. 'I'll bet you three to one now that it closes above eighty-five.'

'I'll take you on that,' said Jerry. 'Fifty to a hundred and fifty.'

'You're on,' said Wallie smiling, and he poured another shot of Scotch all round.

The ticker chattered, and they all watched it. The market was beginning to move a little, towards the closing hour. Steel was up a quarter; Cuban Gas up a half—and then Silk came out, first still at the eighth, then the next sale at a quarter up. Wallie smiled.

'It's going to break,' Jerry said, inspired by the drinks. 'You think it'll close above 85. I'll bet you another fifty, if you'll give me four to one. Fifty to two hundred.'

'I'll take you,' said Wallie, still smiling. What was two hundred dollars? He had more than two hundred thousand in the game, and he was particularly watching Cuban Gas, on which he had some hot information.

But two hundred meant a good deal to Jerry. It was a very appreciable percentage of his whole income.

All together in silence now, they watched the ticker, which was silent also, and then spoke of indifferent matters, of U.S. Steel, of Black Belt Railway, of American Can. Cuban Gas went up another eighth. Then Silk again, still at the quarter over eighty-five.

‘You’re wrong, Wallie. The trend is all downwards,’ Lloyd said. ‘That was only a flurry; the market’s starting to move a bit. I’m a natural bear, a natural pessimist. I believe everything is going to get worse. I’m all for Schopenhauer as against Kant, and I think the categorical imperatives aren’t really imperative at all. Perhaps we can’t escape them, but they’re not really serious for all that, just as it isn’t really serious that I can’t see the back of my own head . . .’

Minnesota Silk eighty-five and one-eighth.

‘I’ll bet you another fifty at three to one,’ Jerry said.

Wallie nodded, smiling. He didn’t care much whether he won or lost, on these small games, but he liked the little gamble, and was always ready to take the short end. He poured the Scotch again, and made the syphon fizz. Jerry swallowed his drink, looking rather thirsty and excited and anxious. Derrock knew exactly how he was feeling. The ticker spoke again. Silk eighty-five, and then again Silk eighty-five.

‘Do you want to bet again?’ Jerry asked, but Wallie shook his head, smiling.

‘Not at the same price. I’ll take even money.’

‘Done!’ said Jerry. ‘Fifty-fifty!’

The ticker chattered, but it said nothing about Silk, and it was close to the end of the day’s trading. Wallie poured whisky again, and again the machine spoke with interest. Silk was down to 84-7/8.

‘I’ll give you the odds this time,’ Jerry offered. ‘A hundred to fifty.’

Wallie shook his head, smiling. He liked the little gamble, but he wouldn’t bet against a sure thing, and he knew that this was almost certainly the closing movement. He drank his whisky, and they all listened for the voice of the little brass and glass oracle, the centre of more hope and faith than any other modern god, speaking straight and without any illusion.

Silk sold down to eighty-four and three-quarters.

‘The trend is all down. I told you so,’ said Lloyd. ‘I’ll bet you four to one, Wallie—if Rock will lend me a hundred.’

‘Not a cent,’ Derrock said.

Wallie said nothing, smiling, drinking his Scotch. All this was only a by-play for him, to pass a rather dull afternoon. He had probably more than a quarter of a million up on the big board, staked on one thing and another; but the end of trading was imminent now.

Minnesota Silk eighty-four and seven-eighths.

‘I’ll bet you anything you like, any odds you like, that it closes below eighty-five!’ said Lloyd.

But Wallie shook his head. Five minutes later the day ended, and Minnesota Silk still stood at eighty-four and seven-eighths.

Wallie calculated the accounts and wrote the cheques, still smiling. He had lost about \$500, but the little gamble had been worth it, and during the same time he had won about \$6000 on a small rise in Cuban Gas. Derrock, Lloyd and Jerry had lost on the first pool bet, but Jerry had afterwards won about \$500 on his private betting. Altogether he had made by a series of happy chances more than he could have earned by a month of heavy labour in the production of a highly useful and wholesome sweet; and the moral of it was too obvious to be ignored.

Perhaps he did not ignore it. He said to Wallie, pocketing the cheque.

‘We’re going on to Wellington London’s studio reception. You’d better come with us.’

‘I don’t like studios,’ said Wallie, suddenly glum.

They went out to the street, and Jerry bought them packets of enormously expensive imported cigarettes. It was too windy and cold on the street to smoke them, but it was not far to London’s studio. They did not much want to go there, but Jerry dragged them, influential now with his winnings. London’s studio was in the business district, for he always said that an artist should be a business man as well as an artist and it was at the very top of the highest business building, for London was the highest paid artist in—well anywhere you liked to mention.

Miss London let them in, with her usual weary, pleased welcome. The great studio was warm and bright, and there was a great crowd. The curtains were drawn back, and from the windows you could see far out over the bay,

over the steely-blue waters lapping into white-caps, far away to the icy-pale horizon.

It was London's great day, the first of his monthly studio days, and tea and cakes were being served out to everybody. Everybody who was anybody was there, or had been there, or was going to look in later. The Mayor of Toronto had just been there; the Lieutenant-Governor was expected to look in later in the afternoon. Three or four dozen women and a score of men were in the studio at that moment, and they were coming and going all the time. At the door, Miss London was in a confusion of greetings and farewells.

All the up-town crowd was there, or had been, or was coming—all the wealthy, the English, the would-be English, the imperialists, the loyalists, the York Club, the Daughters of the Empire. Derrock saw Sir Edward Williams, the banking nobleman, and Sir William Edwards, the chain-store nobleman. Solway Leviticus was there, blond and immensely well-groomed, holding his silk hat and gloves and stick, condescending to art as a gentleman should though not for long at a time. All through the place were little tea-tables, and tea and cakes were going in all directions. Those who wanted it could even have bottled Bass, but nothing stronger. London was not the man to dope you up with liquor and sell you a picture when you didn't know what you were about, as he falsely accused Jimmy Fitzgerald of doing. All around the tables Miss Blanche circulated with her sweetness, her near-sightedness, her devotion to her brother's genius; and London himself circulated from the most important visitor to the next most important, smiling, happy, wearing a dark lounge suit, with no artistic nonsense about him, but a simple English gentleman, and the interpreter of the different sections of the Empire to one another.

There was an uproar of delighted talk, of eating and drinking. Everybody was happy. Upon one wall of the studio a sort of small exhibition had been arranged of London's latest work. There was a scientifically neutral background of burlap, and on it hung four rather large portraits, several smaller figure pictures, and a number of landscapes. Glittering in their heavy gold frames, all urbane and correct and slick, nobody could possibly say anything against them. In fact, nobody could possibly say anything about them at all. During these years of effort in which London had attained the position of the greatest Canadian painter in the world, he had learned to produce without effort. No teddy bear ate into his heart. He had come to paint as if it were a natural secretion of his glands, and he would probably have fallen ill if the secretion had ceased to function. If you stopped in front

of the little exhibition for a moment you found London at your elbow, urbane and cheerful.

‘You like that? Really? Awfully good of you to say so.’

Sitting together at a small table and drinking tea and eating cake greedily were several professors of University College, speaking together in the rich Oxford accent which they had contrived to preserve almost uncorrupted through these years of Canadian cold storage. At a little distance Derrock saw Lady William Edwards talking to London. They were talking seriously. He made a note in a little book; she nodded at him; they smiled—munificently—gratefully. Sold! Decidedly London had no need to hug any chimaera. He had attained almost all that any artist could possibly desire. No one would ever burn any of these pictures, for they were worth their weight in pure gold—not, of course, including the frames.

People came and went. The Lieutenant-Governor came, but he did not stay long. There was an incessant clatter of greeting, of leave-taking, of eating and drinking. Suddenly Derrock felt that he would perish if he did not get out of that place. Either he would fall down in a fit of asphyxiation, or he would scream out, or commit an indecent assault. He grasped Jerry’s arm.

‘Come on. Let’s get out of here.’

‘Wait. I want to talk to Professor Wright.’

But Derrock dragged him, and dragged Lloyd with him. They did not want to go, but Derrock overcame them with his own intensity. They went down in the elevator, and out to the street. It had grown colder still, and the cutting wind pierced a thick overcoat.

‘Where do you want to go now, Rock?’ Lloyd said, sourly.

‘I’d like a drink,’ Jerry said.

Derrock had plenty of drinks in his rooms, but he did not want to take them there. He knew what it would mean—sitting up all night and wrangling about poetry and the philosophy of life. He couldn’t stand that. He knew all about the philosophy of life, and he didn’t want any more poetry.

‘I’d like something to eat,’ Lloyd said. ‘Rock dragged me away before I could get anything but a cucumber sandwich.’

‘I’m going to put up the finest dinner in Toronto for you fellows,’ Jerry said. ‘Caviare and stuffed peacock and nightingale’s tongues and champagne. This is my lucky day.’

‘That’s all very well, but it isn’t time for dinner yet,’ said Lloyd. ‘I want something to eat now.’

‘And a drink,’ said Jerry.

So they went to the tea-room of the Imperial Royal, where Jerry ordered a large chicken salad, and Lloyd, the pressman, was able to obtain cups of strong tea with it. They sat and ate, and Jerry passed his box of expensive cigarettes. Outside it was windy and snowing. Weary and chilled crowds dodged between the motors and the trams. Furtive-looking people came from the government liquor store, carrying bottles of whisky which they would drink secretly in their bedrooms. Happy people thronged the Canadian National Railway office, buying tickets to go somewhere else.

At the far end of the tea-room an orchestra crashed out the fast fox-trot, an orchestra of authentic Alabama negroes, who, however, resided mostly in Harlem. Dancing couples swirled past the tables, men in business suits, women in gorgeous and filmy afternoon frocks. Green and crimson, yellow and blue and orange. Derrock saw Doris Dovercourt, wearing a frock of almost virginal white, but shot through and through with a weave of pale gold, as if she had been splashed like Danae. She was dancing with Geoffrey Arlington, portly and short-winded now. When she caught sight of Derrock her eyes widened a little; then she stuck out her tongue at him over her partner’s shoulder, just half an inch of pink tongue for an instant, with a candid, impudent, malicious grin.

‘This is the life!’ said Jerry, drinking Scotch tea. ‘To make a lot of money easily and blow it in quickly. To drink, to dance, to beat the game . . .’

‘In short, to speed up,’ Derrock said. ‘Why don’t you dance?’

‘I’ve got a lame foot. Besides I never learned to fox-trot.’

‘You can’t speed up anywhere in this country,’ said Lloyd sourly. ‘The Puritan has fixed the speed limit at about ten. The other night Rock and I drove all around the city from midnight to sunrise, and all we could find to do was to eat ham and eggs at a night lunch-counter. Now if we were in Vienna or Seville . . .’

‘It would be exactly the same thing,’ Jerry said.

‘Have you ever been in Seville?’ Lloyd asked disdainfully.

‘No, but wherever you get a crowd together it’s always the same thing, as soon as you get over the difference in language and small local customs.’

‘*Sub specie aeternitatis*, perhaps,’ said Lloyd, still more contemptuously. ‘But you won’t deny that we could have a good deal more fun in Seville than here.’

‘Well, you might cry for madder music and for stronger wine,’ Jerry returned, ‘but I hardly see how you could hope to get it. The dance-room would probably be shabbier, and the Spanish women . . .’

He stopped short. Lola Matanzas had just come into the room, and the orchestra chanced to stop short at that moment, as if for her entrance. She was dressed all in black and yellow, and she looked like some large and probably venomous tropical insect. Passing their table she glanced indifferently, coldly and without recognition, at Lloyd and Derrock, but she fixed a powerful momentary blank stare upon Jerry, whom she had never seen before. Jerry was obviously staggered with the impact of it.

‘Yes—Seville!’ he muttered. ‘The Spanish women . . .’

Recovering himself, he tried to catch the eye of a waiter, and managed to order more cups of strong tea. The African art music was stilled. It was an interval between dances. Across the room Derrock saw Doris in her white frock, outlined against the pale gold of the wall like a Botticelli angel. She was eating an ice-cream mixture with a spoon and trying to catch his eye, and she made him a sign, just a little twist of the head, that she wanted to speak to him. He went over to her as the jazz started again, and they danced.

‘What’s the matter with you, Rock? I haven’t seen you for ever and ever so long.’

‘I’ve been very busy. I’ve had to work hard.’

‘Don’t you ever drive any more?’ Doris asked complainingly. ‘I’ve been expecting you to drive me home, one of these evenings.’

‘No, I don’t drive any more. My car was smashed.’

Doris hadn’t heard about it.

‘That’s too bad. We’ve got a new car this fall, a real fast one this time. I’d like to drive you in it. But it’s too cold for much fun in motoring now. Where do you live, Rock? I’ve never seen your place. You might ask me to tea some time, in your rooms.’

‘All right, Doris,’ he said heavily.

‘Ring me up. Call me any day about noon, and we’ll make a date.’

‘All right, Doris.’

He put her back at her table with her confections, and returned to Lloyd and Jerry, who were talking rapidly together, and with an air of greatly increased mutual respect.

‘It’s all rooted in the poison of feminism,’ said Lloyd, smoking Jerry’s expensive cigarettes and talking as if he were Casanova. ‘Women have infected our minds to such an extent that we have actually come to think of the feminine mind, of the woman’s point of view, of the woman’s standpoint, as if it mattered, or as if there was any such thing. Women haven’t any mind. They haven’t any point of view. They haven’t any standpoint, except the point of standing you off as long as possible, to increase their selling value. Then, after the deal has been consummated, they give themselves away, they throw themselves at your head for nothing, for less than nothing, till you discover that they have no value at all.’

‘And both beliefs are equally wrong,’ said Jerry, somewhat flushed with the strong tea, and talking quite as if he were George Moore. ‘But the wise man refuses to be bluffed. He makes the price himself and sits tight and makes the woman come to him, which she inevitably does. This makes her love him quite uncontrollably. And afterwards, he still keeps the price up; he refuses to let her throw herself away, to depreciate herself; and this makes her hate him quite uncontrollably. And so he is able to get rid of her altogether and start all over again.’

‘But in Utopia,’ Derrock said, ‘the relations of the sexes are entirely uncomplicated. Science there has reached such perfection that a simple serum treatment administered shortly after birth renders nearly the whole population immune for life against all the fevers of concupiscence. They neither bed maritally, nor melt down in the flames of Venus. All that is done for them by specialists. A small number of select individuals, picked by the government eugenicists, attend to all the duties of reproduction, and they do nothing else. By this frightfully wise arrangement, the population is able to lead a perfectly healthy sort of life, and they spend their whole time in labour, which has been elevated to the dignity of a religion, and in the playing at games of chance, which is considered an important branch of commerce, and in the production of large, but uninteresting works of art.’

‘Precisely so! The drones, however . . .’ Jerry began eagerly, and then stopped short, looking up in fascination. Lola Matanzas was passing the table again, and she glanced aside at Derrock and made him a sign to follow her, just a tilt of the head. He went after her, and overtook her in the open space just within the doorway.

‘Do you want me to put you wise, Rock?’

‘I’d rather that you’d make me happy, Lola.’

‘Well, maybe I can do that too.’

She looked at him heavily, powerfully, and deep in her great brown eyes he fancied that he saw a flicker of tenderness; or maybe it was only a glimmer from something hard at the bottom.

‘Are you doing anything with the market now?’

‘I’ve been out of the market lately.’

‘Cuban Gas is going to move up. I’ve got it straight. They’re going to declare a big stock dividend. All the wise money is going up on it. It moved up two points to-day, and it’ll gain maybe fifteen points within a week—maybe thirty. Then it’ll crash back. It’s your chance to make a killing.’

‘Did you get that tip from Wallie?’

‘It don’t matter where I got it. It’s the straight goods, and you can plunge on it. Wallie and I have parted, Rock. We’re still perfectly good friends, but we’ve decided to run separately. When two people don’t love each other any more,’ said Lola virtuously, ‘I think they ought to quit. Don’t you think so?’

‘Sure I do.’

She looked at him closely and smiled ever so faintly, and her great creamy Spanish face seemed to open and blossom out like some aphrodisical flower.

‘It’s a long time since you’ve been to see me, Rock. Maybe we didn’t hit it just right the last time. Come again, won’t you? Any night, after the show. You might ring me up first, and I’ll be expecting you.’

‘All right, Lola,’ he said heavily.

He got his hat and coat. He wandered back to the table, where Jerry and Lloyd were still talking eagerly.

‘Where are you going, Rock?’ Jerry asked him.

Derrock didn’t answer. He didn’t know where he was going.

He went into the lobby and looked out through the glass doors into the street. It was dark and windy and snowing under the glare of the street lights. Cars went past streaked with snow. It was no night for an open sports model. Crowds surged by, weary and harassed, with their coat collars turned

up against the weather. Behind him the primitive art music came out in thick black gushes as the swing doors of the tea-room opened and shut. Pretty, painted flappers, Spanish-Cuban faces, sweet stuff, strong stuff, and a market on which he had a straight tip! The eternal recurrence . . . ! Turning up his coat collar against the weather, he rushed to the office of the Canadian National Railways and bought a ticket for Tuscaloosa, Oklahoma.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

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[The end of *Jupiter Eight* by Francis Lillie Pollock]