

# IT TAKES ALL KINDS

By  
Louis Bromfield



Harper & Brothers Publishers

NEW YORK and LONDON

1939

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FIRST EDITION

## H-O

*The story BETTER THAN LIFE was originally published serially under the title of AND IT ALL CAME TRUE and is published in England under the title of IT HAD TO HAPPEN. The story McLEOD'S FOLLY was originally published serially under the title of YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE.*

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The individual stories contained in this volume are presented  
as separate eBooks.

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# *McLeod's Folly*

AS SHE grew older Mrs. McLeod found that she needed less and less sleep and so took to the practice of rising early, a little after dawn, to work at her book. This allowed her two hours for work and an hour for bathing, dressing and arranging the business of the day with Aida, the cook who had lived in the house for nearly thirty years, ever since the sad morning when J. E. McLeod had the first of the heart attacks which finally carried him away and left the *Daily Shield and Banner*, then Plattsville's leading newspaper, without an editor.

Mrs. McLeod was childless and one might have thought that the business of the day was a simple enough affair, but this was not the case. In the first place the house was enormous, and in a well-advanced state of dilapidation. Then there was Jane Baldwin, her niece by marriage, the daughter of J. E. McLeod's sister, who lived with Mrs. McLeod and had a way of getting herself into a great many romantic and sentimental complications. And then there were the stray men who passed the night and sometimes part of the day in the cellar of the house. And there were Aida's relatives, dark in color and vast in number, who had come to look upon Mrs. McLeod as a kind of family deity who could straighten out all their troubles. She could help to feed those who were broke and see the magistrate who sat in judgment upon those members who woke up in jail on Monday morning, and help through school those members of the family who felt intellectually inclined.

All this and a great many other complications pertained to the realm of housekeeping, but all this represented only the beginning of Mrs. McLeod's day. As a rule, the world of the big house known as "McLeod's Folly" ended at eight-thirty in the morning to begin again in the evening at the hour when she returned, exhausted but happy, from the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*—an hour which was frequently nearer to nine than to six P.M. In between Mrs. McLeod belonged to the *Daily Shield and Banner* and to the town of Platteville.

When Aida came up from Darkietown, she was in her thirtieth year, a buxom, high-yaller girl with plenty of life in her and plenty of admirers. She had a no-good husband who died in a saloon brawl the same year that J. E. McLeod passed away from heart disease, and the two widows found themselves occupying the vastness of the great house on San Antonio Street. Since that year their lives had grown together in a relationship which was now, years afterward, less that of servant and mistress than of old friends who forgave each other anything.

On the whole there was not much to be forgiven on either side. The worst Mrs. McLeod had to forgive was Aida's bullying, and the worst Aida had to forgive was the muddle-headedness of her mistress and friend. There was no longer—there had not been for many years—any question of wages; they lived in a communist state. When there was money they both spent it as if they were millionaires. When there wasn't they both stalled creditors and pinched and scraped, not merely to make ends meet but to feed the stray men in the cellar and to keep what was one of the best tables in the whole of the Southwest. Mrs. McLeod always said, "You can



economize on everything in the world but food.” Aida in her younger days privately added to this philosophy “And love,” but Aida was old now, like Mrs. McLeod, and didn’t have any longer to keep philandering bucks from Darkietown in pocket money. As the years passed and the circulation of the *Daily Shield and Banner* slipped down and down and the advertisers grew fewer and fewer, there was less and less money for Aida and Mrs. McLeod. Luckily the *Daily Shield and Banner* existed, for if money was sometimes scarce, the newspaper did represent a kind of credit. Most of the grocer’s and butcher’s bills were paid by free advertisements in its columns, and there were times when even the plumber had to be satisfied with a quarter column in the pages of the *Daily Shield and Banner* as payment for repairs to burst water pipes and stopped drains.

The great house had been built long ago in the early eighties by J. E. McLeod’s father—the famous “Possum Jack” McLeod, out of his profits in cotton and cattle and real estate, and long ago as the house, beam by beam, nail by nail, raised its rococo splendors above a frontier town of shacks and saloons and humble dwellings, it had promptly been given by the simpler inhabitants of Plattesville the name of McLeod’s Folly. Now, nearly sixty years after, when there were a hundred finer and bigger houses along Alamo Avenue and in the suburbs, the name still stuck.

Although it was a huge house there was really very little room in it, for the architect and Possum Jack McLeod both showed a taste for the grandiose and the fantastic. The rooms were few but enormous and there was a colossal amount of space wasted in a profusion of turrets, oriel windows, stairways and baroque cozy corners. It stood upon a large and

valuable (although much mortgaged) plot of ground surrounded by an old-fashioned wooden fence in a bad state of repair, amid a shaggy overgrown jungle of lilacs, syringas and magnolias, the whole overshadowed by huge and ancient cottonwood trees which littered an unkempt lawn in the late summer with a drift of white down.

Once, long ago, McLeod's Folly had been the heart of Plattesville's residential district, but gradually, during seventy years of growth and prosperity in Plattesville, the residential district had retired, leaving the fantastic turrets and oriel windows to overlook a vista of garages, filling stations, cheap restaurants and coal yards. To have painted McLeod's Folly with all its angles, brackets and fretwork would have cost a small fortune, and no amount of free advertising had ever tempted a painter to attack the nightmare job, and so for twenty years no virgin paint had touched its walls and in this shabby nakedness, bits of fretwork and cornice had rotted and fallen away.

## 1

Like a garrison perpetually besieged and holding out heroically, Mrs. McLeod and Aida shared the old house with their single lodger, Mrs. McLeod's niece.

More sophisticated people than the citizens of Plattesville would have said that Mrs. McLeod was a rank sentimentalist and that all her troubles had arisen from her romanticism and lack of common sense. The truth was that in her youth she had been that rarest of all things—a woman who loved passionately and was loved in return, a woman who had found perfect happiness with one man. The daughter of a Calamos County cattle breeder, she had fallen in love at

nineteen with the twinkling blue eyes, the big mustaches and the six feet two of J. E. McLeod and married him. For fifteen years, until the day he died, she had been happy with him, and afterward for thirty years she was happy in the memory of him. When he died she determined to carry on without him the newspaper which he had loved nearly as much as he loved her, and she determined never to give up that fantastic house known as McLeod's Folly but to go on living in it, afflicted though it became with increasing shabbiness, until she died.

She was perhaps a sentimental woman, but she had integrity of purpose, and money as money didn't mean much to her. She wore clothes, fashionable or not, until they were worn out. She was hospitable and she liked good food, and this Aida provided for her on a miraculously small expenditure of money. Her whole life, which had never known a holiday, was spent between McLeod's Folly and the office and printing press of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. She was untidy because, since the day of J. E. McLeod's death, she had never found time nor reason to make herself attractive. After he died she became merely a kind of machine intent on carrying on the ideas of J. E. and concerned with the welfare of Platteville, which was the only town she had ever known and which she loved very nearly as much as she had loved J. E. McLeod. And in thirty years McLeod's Folly, the *Daily Shield and Banner* and her own open-handedness had devoured the whole fortune which came to her as his widow.

She was tall and thin and very straight. In her youth she had been a beauty, famous in Calamos County and the Southwest, and now in old age, in spite of all her worries, her

untidiness and her distraction, she remained a handsome woman, although now the beauty lay more in the voice, the eyes and the expression than in the body. Although the face was wrinkled, the cheeks sagged and the hair hung in wisps from beneath a worn and dowdy hat, there was something about her that arrested a stranger and made him think, "That must have been a fine, handsome woman."

Until J. E. McLeod began to have the heart attacks which finally killed him, it had never occurred to her that she could write more than the simplest letter, but when he fell ill and had to lie for days propped up in bed, there was nothing for her to do in order to quiet him but go to the office herself to take charge of things. There, because J. E. was the kind of man who did nearly everything himself, she had been forced to learn a great deal overnight. She had even to write editorials which some people thought better than those of J. E. himself. And then, after he died, the idea came to her to write a novel about him and his family, about the people of Calamos County and Plattesville and the pioneer life on the great plains, dusty in the summer, windswept in winter, where she had spent the whole of her life.

Once she began it, she found that there wasn't much time for writing; she had to do it in odd moments, in the early morning or late at night, and as she finished each chapter she put it away in a blue paper envelope and stowed it in an old cowhide trunk in the vast turreted attic of McLeod's Folly.

She belonged to the country; it was in her blood as it was in the sap of the rugged old cottonwoods that rattled their leaves just outside the window. She had no idea what she meant to do with the novel when she had finished it. It simply *had* to be done. And no one knew anything of its existence

but Aida. Not even her niece, Jane Baldwin, suspected that for two hours before the dreadful sound of the alarm clock roused her, Mrs. McLeod had been working away like a beaver, in the little room on the second floor which had once been J. E. McLeod's den, where J. E.'s fountain pen and pipe and tobacco jar were left untouched exactly as he had left them on the evening he dropped dead. It was a little room which Mrs. McLeod did not even trust Aida to clean and put in order; she kept it locked, a sacred place, like the rooms of the Prince Consort in Osborne.

## 2

At eight o'clock on the morning which marked the beginning of the revolution in her life, Mrs. McLeod left J. E.'s den after writing for two hours, locked the door behind her and went down to a breakfast which was line of Aida's best efforts. There were waffles and ham fried in butter (paid for by two paragraphs of advertising in the columns of the *Daily Shield and Banner*)—ham which was crisp round the edges and pink in the center. There was strawberry jam (made in the sun on the roof of the back porch of McLeod's Folly) and spoon bread and honey and black currant jelly and eggs fried in butter and coffee that was sublime, coffee with an aroma more wonderful than all the perfumes of Araby.

Aida, with advancing years, had grown as round and fat as Mrs. McLeod had grown lean, and as she came through the door from the pantry bearing a plate of crisp waffles, her bulk filled the whole doorway. To her, Mrs. McLeod, faded now, old and weather-beaten, was still the pretty young woman she had come to serve when J. E. was still alive, a big vigorous man with the curling mustachios of the wide open spaces and

a bartender's curl on his forehead. To look at Aida one would never have suspected that she was a "worrier." It wasn't natural to her; the habit of worrying had come over her during the long years of days spent alone in the morbid solitude of the vast rooms of McLeod's Folly. Aida would have liked a cozy little house with bright curtains at the windows and a heating system which wasn't cracked, expensive and dirty. Instead of that she dwelt in a vast mausoleum that was like a museum of the eighties with its huge windows and plush curtains, its horsehair furniture and its Axminster carpets. In a way she liked the size and importance of McLeod's Folly despite its shabbiness, but it was a house which made a lot of work and Aida suffered from a vague and perpetual dread that some day it would tumble down on top of herself, Mrs. McLeod and Miss Jane. Meanwhile she worried over the dwindling importance of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, over Miss Jane's friendship with the scalawag son of Old Dougherty, the Democratic boss, and she worried over the men in the cellar and the prospect of one day sharing a cell in the Plattsville jail with Mrs. McLeod. On the whole she kept her worries to herself because she knew Mrs. McLeod had plenty to worry about at the office of the family newspaper.

So when Aida came through the door her café-au-lait face was cheerful and she said with a grin, as she had said every morning for thirty years, "Well, Mis' McLeod, I hope you all slept well."

"Fine, Aida, fine."

It wasn't true. She had lain awake for hours worrying about money to pay for newsprint and whether she would be able to collect the bill for advertising out of the wreckage left

by the bankruptcy of Fillman's Bazaar. But for thirty years she had always replied, "Fine, Aida, fine," and it was too late to change now, even when she felt tired.

Aida distributed the food on the table, making small side remarks which had always been her way of conversing with Mrs. McLeod. She said, "I s'pect The Book is gettin' on pretty big by now?"

"Yes, it's getting on. Not much more to do now."

"Jes' what part is you at now, Mis' McLeod?"

"About the part where Mr. McLeod's grandpappy got caught out in a blizzard when he was eighty-six."

"That must be right near the end?"

"Yes, it's pretty near the end."

Aida gave another side glance at her mistress, "Ain't you all eatin' your spoon bread this mawnin'?"

"Yes, Aida, you know I always finish with that."

Aida pretended to be looking for something in the vast intricacies of the immense Gothic sideboard. When she emerged, she said, "I guess maybe that book you're writin' will make us rich again, Mis' McLeod."

"Don't have too big hopes, Aida," she laughed. "Maybe it'll be just another McLeod's Folly—big and empty."

"What you all gonna call it?"

"I haven't thought about that."

"I kinda think 'McLeod's Folly' would be a good name for it."

Mrs. McLeod stopped eating. She hadn't any appetite but she had been stuffing herself to please Aida. She hadn't even been listening to Aida's chatter, but through the cloud of

worries which oppressed her, she did hear the last sentence. Aida, bending over, exposed only a vast backside covered with calico, and her voice seemed to come from the inside of the Gothic sideboard, like the voice of an oracle and prophetess accompanied by an echo.

For years Mrs. McLeod had thought and thought about what to call the book and now Aida had hit the nail on the head. “McLeod’s Folly!” That was it! A rich and sonorous name with an echo of grandeur in it, summing up, enveloping, a whole epoch, encompassing all the rich, wild, fantastic life of the plains country in the days before the county had been shut in and fenced with wire, the days when Plattesville was a wide-open town filled with strong, colorful, strapping men and women with frontier manners and appetites, the days before there were women’s clubs and lecture courses and Greek restaurant keepers and Irish politicians like Old Dougherty. The picture raised a sudden, sickening wave of nostalgia in Mrs. McLeod. Suddenly she saw Plattesville as it had been nearly fifty years earlier, when she was a wild young girl riding into town with her grandfather on a pinto pony called Satan, down the main street, past the saloons and general stores, to tie Satan to the hitching rail in front of the El Dorado saloon and dance hall run by Gashouse Mary’s father, hoping all the while that she’d meet young J. E. McLeod on the steps of the *Daily Shield and Banner* office.

It was a fine town then, not so big or so rich; but clean and wild, where every citizen was free and most of them honest. It wasn’t this garish overgrown town dominated by Old Dougherty sitting like a spider in the center of the web collecting graft off every saloon and brothel, stealing money



meant for street repairs and new sewers. No, that old life had a dreamlike quality now. Whatever had been harsh and wrong or corrupt had vanished from the image which remained in the brain of Mrs. McLeod at sixty-seven. She wanted desperately to change it, to make a crusade to clean it up and drive Old Dougherty out of power. She wanted to organize a committee of vigilantes once more as her grandfather had done long ago during the land rush when Platteville was filled with all sorts of unruly people, gamblers and strumpets and professional “badmen” and crooks of every kind. It was almost as bad now as it was in those days, worse, perhaps, because all the vice and crookedness wasn’t open and wild and carefree as it had been then but hidden and corrupt and sordid. She sighed so heavily that Aida said, “What’s the matter, Mis’ McLeod? You all ain’t got a misery?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

She didn’t tell Aida that she was sighing because she didn’t have a son, a big two-fisted son like the McLeods and all her own people, a son who could have carried on the *Daily Shield and Banner* and waged a crusade and whipped a man like Old Dougherty. All she had was Jane Baldwin for a society editor and Willie Ferguson, an elderly, untidy, broken-down reporter whose only desire and ambition was to get drunk on Saturday night as soon as the *Daily Shield and Banner* had gone to press.

Again Aida, watching her stealthily, interrupted her thoughts, “I guess Mis’ Jane must have gone to sleep again. She oughta been down ten minutes ago. I never seen such a girl for dozin’ off.”

“She’s young, Aida. Young people need a lot more sleep than old ones like us. Maybe you’d better go and see if she’s

gone off to sleep again.”

Aida started for the door and then turned, “What’s this, Mis’ McLeod, about her courtin’ with that Dougherty boy?”

“Nothing, I guess. Where did you hear that?”

“Gawd-a-mighty, Mis’ McLeod, everybody in town knows about it. That’s why she’s so sleepy, staying up every night to go traipsin’ about with that poor white trash.”

“You mustn’t say that, Aida.”

“Well, Mis’ McLeod, they ain’t nothin’ but shanty Irish and I hate seein’ a nice girl like Mis’ Jane marryin’ into a family like that. What would her poor old grandpappy say if he was alive? Like as not he’d have given her a good whalin’.”

Mrs. McLeod sighed again and said, “Well, Aida, it’s not the same now as it once was. I guess it isn’t any of our business what Miss Jane does. And the Doughertys are rich and Jimmy Dougherty isn’t as bad as the old man. And he’s mighty good-looking.”

“It ain’t his looks I’m worryin’ about. He’s a good-lookin’ enough feller,” Aida retorted with something like wrath. “They’re bad people, the Doughertys.” She snorted, “Money! Anyway we get on without money, don’t we? *We* ain’t had a cent for years.”

She wanted to explain to Aida’s muddled brain that they had had money of a kind, out of the advertising columns of the *Daily Shield and Banner* and that even that might not go on forever. The *Daily Shield and Banner* might die at any moment and then poor Aida would find out what it was like to be without money.

Aida opened the door and as she did so, Jane Baldwin, society editor of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, came in. She wasn't very big, and the immense size of the doorway made her seem even smaller. She was pretty, with golden hair and blue eyes, a stubborn mouth and a turned-up nose, which wrinkled up when she laughed. She was twenty-three but she looked eighteen, a fact which made Aida treat her always as if she were a small child of undeveloped mentality. She was hurrying now, a little stricken in her conscience because she had wakened, turned off the alarm clock and deliberately gone to sleep again, and a little frightened for fear Aida was going to give her a lambasting because she wasn't there when the spoon bread was fresh out of the oven.

"I don't know what's got into me," she said, as she sat down. "I guess it's spring fever. I promise I won't be late again."

Aida pridefully refused to give any response in words, but with a snort far more eloquent, rolled across the room and through the door into the kitchen to bake up waffles for the culprit. Miss Jane could eat a powerful lot for a little thing her size.

When Aida had gone through the door Jane said, "I don't see what right Aida's got to take on as if she was my mother."

Mrs. McLeod laughed, "She hates anybody being late for meals. She's like any good cook. She's an artist—Aida is."

She wanted to ask Jane if she had been out again last night with Jimmy Dougherty. She had heard her come in late, after midnight, while she was lying awake, worrying. Sometimes Jane told her when she went out with Jimmy, but she told only once out of five times, and that showed, Mrs. McLeod knew, that she had a bad conscience. It meant that Jane was

ashamed before her of going around with Old Dougherty's son. It worried Mrs. McLeod because Jane was headstrong, not a bit the way girls had been when Mrs. McLeod was young. In spite of her smallness and youth, there wasn't anything gentle or dovelike about Jane.

Jane said, "I suppose I'll have to go to that Starburger wedding this afternoon. It'll be one of the showiest affairs Plattessville has ever seen."

"And don't forget it's county correspondence day."

"No, I wish I could."

Then a silence fell between them. Neither the old lady nor Jane could think of anything to say although both knew what the other was thinking. They were both thinking about Jimmy Dougherty. The old lady didn't favor him because he was the son of corrupt Old Dougherty, but she had other objections as well, principally a dislike of the idea that one of the McLeod family who had come to Plattessville long ago and grown up with the country should marry the son of an upstart politician who was a newcomer. There wasn't any need to tell all this to Jane, because the girl already knew it. She had grown up on a McLeod ranch and she knew what her own family was like; she knew their pride and their honor and their sense of decency. She knew, too, that no matter how poor they were, none of them would ever do a dishonorable thing for the sake of money. For more than fifty years the whole county had looked up to the tribe of McLeod and depended on them for order, and duty, and good government. But that was changed now; with Plattessville booming there didn't seem to be any need of the McLeods and their old-fashioned standards. They were all out-of-date, as out-of-date as McLeod's Folly itself, sitting in desolation among its ancient cottonwood trees.

Presently Mrs. McLeod coughed and pushed back her chair and stood up. “Well,” she said, “I’ll be off. I’ve got a lot of people to see this morning.” Then she turned and called toward the kitchen door, “Aida!”

A voice answered, “Yes, Mis’ McLeod!” And the solid figure rolled through the door.

“I’ll be in for supper.” Hesitating, she turned toward her niece and said, “What about you, Jane?”

Jane gulped and said, “I’ll be out.”

Mrs. McLeod didn’t say anything, but Aida could not contain herself. “You’re gonna have a bad stomach, Mis’ Janey—eatin’ around like you do—all sorts of trash. You’re lookin’ powerful peaked lately. If you was mine I’d give you a good dose of sulphur and molasses.”

“Leave her alone, Aida,” said Mrs. McLeod. And Aida went back to her kitchen not saying anything audible on her way out, but muttering and grumbling all the while like a volcano.

She went on grumbling and talking to herself while she baked up another heap of waffles and fried more eggs. She wasn’t cooking her own breakfast; she would have that when everyone in the house, visible and invisible, was fed. When the cooking was finished she loaded up a huge tray with waffles, jam, eggs, spoon bread and coffee and pushing open the screen door of the kitchen with one foot, she descended the steps of the back porch and after ten steps turned and went down the outside stairs into the cellar. On such occasions she always had to go outside the house to gain the cellar; the inside stairway was too narrow to permit the passage of so large and so heavily laden a tray.

Once inside the cellar, she put the tray down on a cheap wooden table and called out, “Hey! You all! Your breakfast is awaitin’,” and after a moment two figures appeared out of the warm furnace room beyond. One was that of a stooped and graying man of about sixty, dressed in shabby clothes of decaying, humble, middle-class respectability. The other was a boy of about nineteen wearing a blue denim overall stained with grease and dirt. At the sight of the tray of hot food his blue eyes grew bright with excitement.

Aida said, “There it is. Better get at it while it’s hot. And if you want more, all you got to do is pound on the ceiling. Ma stove is right over your heads.”

Then she went away and in a little while the sound of pounding set her to work at the waffle iron once more.

### 3

In the huge hallway Mrs. McLeod took down from a coatrack, carved out of wood in the form of a tree with bear cubs climbing up it, a worn blue serge coat which had turned purple along the seams, and a red fox fur which had come long ago to look more coyote than fox. On top of her screwed-up hair she placed a hat with a little worn plume sticking upright on one side. Then she opened the large worn leather bag which was a kind of trade-mark, to make sure that she had plenty of pencils and copy paper, and with a quick glance in the mirror, turned and went out the door. Coming down the weed-grown path between the ancient shaggy laburnums and spirea, the figure of Mrs. McLeod had about it a curious, almost ghostly quality, as if McLeod’s Folly were an enchanted place in which time stood still. It was the figure of a woman who was dressed in shabby worn clothes of a

style that had passed like that of McLeod's Folly itself, years ago. Meeting her as she passed through the gateway, you might have thought Mrs. McLeod a ghost, save for the light in the eyes. It was the glance of someone who at sixty-seven was still very much alive, the glance of someone who, despite the fact that she had never been farther from Plattsville than Galveston and Memphis, missed very little that happened about her and knew very nearly everything there was to know of the human race.

She was setting out upon the morning round of news collecting. Years ago she had arranged it so that in the morning she visited certain shops and places of business; Jane in the afternoon visited another series of establishments and Willie Ferguson had the district where lay the railroads and factories, all save Franklin Street with its sinister houses, grim and shuttered by day, glittering and raucous by night. It was no good letting Willie visit Franklin Street. Long ago she had permitted it, but the visits only ended two times out of three with Willie getting drunk and disappearing for a day or two, and then Willie's wife, Myrtle, the cashier in the *Daily Shield and Banner* office, would become hysterical and the whole office would be upset for days. So for a long time Franklin Street, except from six o'clock Saturday night to nine o'clock Monday morning, was out of bounds for Willie. What he did during those hours was his own affair so long as it did not interfere with the business of the *Daily Shield and Banner*.

From long experience she knew where to find the news. At the undertaking establishments she checked up on deaths and accidents. Hostetter was a modern undertaker who had a funeral chapel, wore elegant clothes and called himself a

mortician. Beyond grim facts his establishment never yielded much news. The office, a sort of waiting room for Charon's ferry, was done in violet and black with a dark green carpet and a rich mahogany desk behind which sat Mr. Hostetter himself, dressed even on non-ceremonial occasions in suitable heavy black broadcloth. The place and the too smooth personality of Mr. Hostetter himself always dampened the spirits of Mrs. McLeod. There was something unctuous and heavy about the establishment which not only brought death very near but made it seem a pompous and boring affair like the reception of a visiting notable. And Mr. Hostetter himself never had any gossip or any tips. In the aloofness of his role as Charon's assistant he seemed to have no contact of a human sort with his fellow citizens.

So the visit there was always brief.

"Good morning, Mr. Hostetter."

"Good morning, Mrs. McLeod."

Mr. Hostetter rose and came forward, washing his hands, to greet her. The greeting always alarmed her a little, for it seemed to her that the cold green eyes of the undertaker were always regarding her as a prospective client. More than once she had thought grimly, "When I die he can't take out his bill in advertising because the *Daily Shield and Banner* will die with me."

"Any news, Mr. Hostetter?"

"No, Mrs. McLeod. Nothing since the Jones funeral yesterday. Were you able to attend?"

"No, I can never get away at that hour."

"A pity. It was one of the best conducted funerals Platteville has ever seen."



“I don’t like funerals much,” observed Mrs. McLeod, moving slowly toward the door.

Anticipating her, because even the publicity of a dying paper like the *Daily Shield and Banner* had its value, Mr. Hostetter reached the door first and held it open for her. “You mustn’t think of funerals like that. It’s just a passing through the gates.”

“Yes, Mr. Hostetter, I expect you’re right, but ... (she couldn’t say that she disliked his unctuous way of preparing the gates) ... but, well, I’ve got so much work to do. I don’t like to think that far ahead.”

“Good morning, Mrs. McLeod.”

“Good morning, Mr. Hostetter.”

Once in the street, she took a deep breath of that good, fresh, dry air for which Plattsville was famous. She put away her pencil, snapped her bag, and set out for the next stop, which was Jim Newman’s Undertaking Parlors.

Jim belonged to her generation and tradition, so she felt at home there and approached the place with none of the dread which chilled her bones as she opened the door of Mr. Hostetter’s mortuary. Jim she had known since he was a boy. He came from Calamos County, which was the site of her father’s own ranch. Mr. Hostetter came from Brooklyn. Jim’s undertaking establishment occupied a comfortable old building of red brick that stood back from the street with a stable at one side which sheltered the black hearse and the ebony horses. Mrs. McLeod liked that; it made her feel that there remained in the world at least one pair of horses which could conduct her to the grave with dignity. The thought of being whisked off to eternity in Mr. Hostetter’s Buick hearse did not please her.

When she opened the door she found Jim and a half-dozen cronies seated about the iron stove. The air was hot and filled with tobacco smoke and the faint scent of embalming fluid, but somehow you noticed the faint acrid smell no more than you would notice the stale scent of beer in Hennessey's saloon. It belonged to the place and there was nothing sinister about it. The cronies were all men about Jim's age, all of them over sixty, belonging to the county, with childhood memories which matched those of Mrs. McLeod. She knew them all. They came from the ranches and farms out on the plains. Because it was Saturday they had all come into town in old Fords and Chevrolets. One of them, Sam Henderson, a die-hard, wouldn't even own a motor. He drove the twenty miles from his place in a buckboard drawn by a couple of piebalds in which he took great pride. They all greeted her as she came in, Sam shooting a great jet of tobacco juice into the box of sawdust by the stove and calling out, "Hello, Vinnie. You get younger every time I see you."

Jim told Sam Henderson to get up and give her his chair because here Mrs. McLeod never remained standing as she did in Hostetter's antechamber to Heaven; here she sat down and chatted. Here she garnered bits of gossip and news and hints of births and deaths and marriages to come in all parts of the huge county. Here she took out her pencil and sheets of copy paper and wrote in her scratchy illegible handwriting item after item in the saga of the great rich country she loved so much.

Jim Newman himself was a fat man, monstrously fat. When he sat down his stomach fell forward and rested on his knees. He did not rise when Mrs. McLeod came in: he rose

and lifted the stomach off his knees as seldom as possible. He only grinned at her and said, “Well, Vinnie, what news?”

“Nothing,” said Mrs. McLeod.

Sam Henderson handed her a Mexican cigarette, lighted it for her and said, “Henry Goddard’s girl is gonna marry Jim Wilson’s boy.”

“Which one?”

“The one that was to St. Louis to the hairdressin’ school.”

“I guess that means she’ll give up hairdressin’,” said Jim, “in favor of diapers.”

Out of the worn bag came the copy paper and pencil.

“How’s the old rag getting on?” asked Sam.

“So-so,” said Mrs. McLeod writing away on her copy paper.

“What you need is an up and comin’ young fella to help you,” said Jim. “We ain’t as young as we once were ... not even you, Vinnie.”

“Where am I gonna find him?”

“Try prayer,” said Hal Pierce; “the Methodists are having a big revival over to Little Canyon. You might go over and ask the parson to put in a word for you.”

One by one they brought out more items from the life of the county and Mrs. McLeod wrote them down. The *Daily Shield and Banner* was a good county paper; it never lacked county news, and subscriptions had never flagged among the villages and ranches beyond the borders of the town. All that was *her* country and *her* people. She knew them. It was in the town that the newspaper seemed old-fashioned and a little empty. Mrs. McLeod never understood the Greeks, the Italians, the Irish. She couldn’t fathom or like very much the

sort of people who huddled together in cities. While she jotted down her notes, the five old boys from the plains went on making jokes and kidding her, smoking and spitting into the sawdust box. All of them had known her since she was a little girl, and now, when she was old like themselves, they still treated her as if all of them were still young bucks and she was the belle of some county gathering which had happened long ago when nobody thought anything of driving forty miles across the plains in open wagons. They knew that the worn coat, the shabby fur, the funny hat with a plume in it were a little ridiculous, but they knew too the sturdiness, the integrity, the honesty, the heart beneath the odd exterior. And all of them had been friends of J. E. McLeod and all of them knew the strange willful streak of pride and indefatigability that was in every member of the McLeod family, even in Jane Baldwin, who had been East to school.

“It’s catching,” Jim Newman used to say about the McLeod pride and stubbornness. “Everybody who marries into the family comes down with it—not that Vinnie McLeod didn’t come by a big share from her own family.”

## 4

When Mrs. McLeod found she had gleaned everything there was to be got out of the gossip about the stove, she said, “Well, boys, I got to go along now. If anything good turns up, write to me,” and she went out to a chorus of “Good-by, Vinnie. Good luck.”

As she left them, she walked across the little plot in front of the house feeling cheered and strengthened, but as she turned into the street once more a subtle depression settled over her like a cloud. It was always fun calling at Jim

Newman's, especially on Saturdays when the boys came into Plattsville from all over the county; but what lay ahead of her did not raise her spirits. She had to visit the courthouse, which was dull, and the police station and the magistrate's court, and then she had to make a call on Old Dougherty, and if there was time she would call on Gashouse Mary. The last was the only visit in which there was any prospect of friendliness or cheer.

As she walked along the street, about one out of every three citizens she passed said, "Good morning, Mrs. McLeod." Once she had known every citizen in the town, and now she knew nearly all the old ones. Some of the old ones thought her funny and nearly all the new ones did. Half of those who said "Good morning" were negroes, some of them as old as herself and older. She walked down Louisiana Street and into Main Street, which she had known since the time it was a dusty unpaved thoroughfare with saloons and hitching rails and gambling houses on each side. Now it was like the main street of any one of a thousand American towns, lined with shops and chain stores and movie houses and office buildings and parked automobiles. It was the sight of Main Street more than anything in the town which made Mrs. McLeod feel old. No matter how many times she saw it, there was always a faint contraction of the heart, and a faint sickish feeling of nostalgia.

She didn't much want to call on Old Dougherty, but his office was on the way to Gashouse Mary's and she had decided suddenly that calling on Gashouse Mary would cheer her up. After that she would go to the magistrate's court, which would probably be finished and closed until Monday,

and then go to the police station where, with a little luck, she would find nothing but the routine record to copy.

The drama and the misery of all that concerned the police she would have avoided every day in the year if it had been possible; the spectacle, especially as it was conducted under the régime of Old Dougherty and his henchmen, filled her with pity and despair. But it wasn't possible to avoid the spectacle and be a good newspaper reporter. The subscribers of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, she knew, liked news of burglaries, murders and rape, and sometimes in the police court she came across a good human story, and good human stories, she knew, were the life blood of a newspaper's circulation.

There wasn't any humanity or even any intelligence to be found in the administration of the police court and the jail. Bill Flynn, the magistrate, always seemed to her to be less a judge than an exploiter of human ills. And he was hardest of all on the poor devils who drifted through Plattessville looking for work, not the tramps who knew the place and had it marked and avoided it, but honest fellows trying to find a job and make a new start. Bill Flynn never took any notice of the difference between a professional bum and an honest man looking for a job. None of them ever had a chance, because each one meant money in the pockets of the Dougherty gang. The charge of "vagrancy" covered almost anything. It meant that any stranger out of work might be clapped into jail for two or three months to work for Old Dougherty. For two or three months the poor wretch would have to work digging ditches, laying bricks, collecting garbage and refuse, for the city of Plattessville, but his work brought no saving to the taxpayers because Old Dougherty charged the city with a

whole payroll and took the money himself. It was, Mrs. McLeod knew, a vicious system all round because it kept citizens of Plattesville out of work which otherwise might have been theirs. She knew all about that too, but she couldn't think how to go about cleaning up such a situation. You couldn't bring accusations unless you had proof and the money to back it up.

She was still worrying and dreading what lay before her when she turned off Main Street through Cherokee Alley to make the short cut that would bring her to the Dougherty Block. The alley was narrow and dark and in it were the Busy Bee Lunch and the Eureka Beer Saloon which attracted unfortunate strays by the cheapness of their prices. Once they left the river front they came here like bees to clover, and Dougherty's gang, knowing this, always had a policeman somewhere about to pick up new workers on charges of vagrancy. Mrs. McLeod always took this short cut, not only because it was a short cut but because often enough she might encounter an unfortunate or two and warn them out of town before it was too late. Now, as she turned into the alley, she forgot her depression and looked about her sharply for any shabbily dressed man who might be looking for a job.

Before she had gone a dozen yards she saw coming toward her the tattered figure of a middle-aged man who was clearly down on his luck. He needed a shave. His felt hat, once a dark green, was faded by wind, rain and sun to a bilious shade of yellow green. His clothes were worn and bagged at the knees and elbows. In the discouraged face there was a look of weariness, despair and actual fear, like the fear of an animal which has been beaten and kicked for too long. She

knew all the signs. She had met them a thousand times in the last three or four years.

She watched him come toward her, and as he was about to pass, she said as brightly as she could, "Good morning."

He stopped, looked at her for a second in a startled way, then he answered, "Good morning."

"Out of work?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. You don't happen to know of a job?" A note of despair came into his voice. "Any kind of job."

"No, I don't," she said, "but you oughtn't to be walking around this town looking for one."

"Why not? All I want is a chance to work."

"Well, this is the wrong town. If the police see you, they'll pick you up for a vagrant and then you'll get a couple of months working for the city."

The man only stared at her as if what she said was the last straw. So she went on. "See here. I'll tell you what to do. You go straight ahead of you up that first street on the right and when you get to the top of the hill turn right and walk two blocks up the street and you'll come to a big house with a big yard all around it. It's the only big house in the street, so you can't miss it. When you get there, you go to the back door. You'll find a colored woman. Just tell her Mrs. McLeod sent you. She'll give you a good meal and you can have a bath and press your clothes and hide away, and tonight you can get out of town again."

The man looked at her silently with a puzzled expression. "If anybody—a policeman, I mean—stops you, just say you're going to work for Mrs. McLeod. Now," she added briskly, "have you got all that straight?"



“Well,” said the man, “pretty straight.”

She repeated the instructions again, slowly, and then added, “If you get lost, just ask anybody where McLeod’s Folly is. That’s what everybody calls the house. Anybody can tell you.”

“All right, ma’am,” said the man. He still looked a little dazed, but he lifted his hat and said, “Thank you, ma’am,” and then went on his way, crossing the street and going up the hill. For a moment she stood there, watching him to make certain he was following her directions. Once he turned and looked back, still with an astonished expression. When he saw her still standing there, he raised his hat again.

The encounter cheered her a little. If the man got beyond Main Street he’d be very likely safe until Aida hid him in the cellar, and at nightfall with a little luck, he could get out of town either by a passenger local or by one of the night freight trains. She knew the train schedules. Tom Higgins, the station agent, even kept her up-to-date on freight trains. She knew all the spots where trains stopped for water or slowed up for long pulls. It was all part of the system worked out between herself and Aida. Aida liked all the mystery—she liked having tramps hidden in the cellar. (She kept them in the cellar and locked the door of the inside stairway.) But most of all she liked feeding up people who hadn’t had enough to eat for weeks. It cost both money and trouble, and if Dougherty’s gang ever got wind of the “Underground Railway Station” in McLeod’s Folly, the thing might become serious.

Odd kinds turned up in the shelter—men who borrowed through Aida books from J. E.’s dusty classical library, one man who said he had been president of a bank, another who had been a professor, and one who said that he was an Italian

count. Most of the refugees Mrs. McLeod discovered in the part of the town which lay along the river; the others nearly always were rescued from the teeth of the police in Cherokee Alley. If a day passed without her sending along some unfortunate to McLeod's Folly, Aida was disappointed and grew ill-tempered.

As she emerged into the Courthouse Square, she ran full into Sam Hildreth, the policeman on duty to round up the strays of Cherokee Alley. He saluted and called out, "Good morning, Mrs. McLeod," and at the sound of his voice she started and blushed furiously.

"Good morning," she said.

"Looks like you were in a hurry. Going to a fire?"

Her heart beat furiously and she had to use all her will-power to control her voice. "No, but Saturday's an awful busy day."

She hurried on until she reached the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Fountain in the center of the Square, and there, as she hurried round it, she came upon another man who lifted his hat and asked politely, "Excuse me, ma'am. Could you spare me something for a cup of coffee?"

He was a young man, dressed in a gray flannel suit that was stained with dirt, and the hat he held in his hand was faded and the band missing. It astonished her that he stopped her because such men usually passed her by, judging no doubt from the dowdiness of her clothes that she was not worth a touch. Nearly always she had to speak to them first.

Hastily she opened the leather bag and took out a quarter, and as she passed it to him, he said, "Thank you," and it occurred to her suddenly that there was something about him that was very like J. E. McLeod when he was a young man.

He had no mustaches and no curl on the forehead, but there was something about the set of the big shoulders and the jaw and the look in the blue-gray eyes which called up a swift vision of J. E. standing long ago on the steps of the *Daily Shield and Banner* office.

Looking quickly behind her, she said, "You better take my advice and get away from here before you're picked up for vagrancy."

"Thanks, ma'am, I'll follow your advice."

Then she drew aside so that the fountain was between them and the figure of Sam Hildreth, now standing in front of Hennessey's saloon. "Listen," she said, and gave him the same directions she had given the man in Cherokee Alley.

The young man did not seem to pay very close attention to what she was saying. He kept looking at Sam Hildreth and then back at her. So little attention did he give to what she was saying that she felt suddenly as if she were talking to herself and said, "Are you paying attention?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the young man.

"Well, you'd better get out of here quick before that policeman sees you or you're as good as in jail for two months."

"Thank you, ma'am," said the young man.

Then she hurried away, looking back timidly once or twice over her shoulder. When she turned the corner to go in the direction of the Dougherty Block he was still standing there by the fountain watching Sam Hildreth.

"What's the matter with him?" she thought. "You'd think he *wanted* to be arrested and clapped into jail."

All the way to Old Dougherty's office she kept thinking about him. There was something about him that was puzzling. It wasn't only that he looked like J. E. He had, too, an air of determination, almost of authority. He didn't have about him that look of despair and defeat which most vagrants had, and his clothes, despite their stained and rumpled condition, obviously weren't tramps' clothing. Being a reporter, for thirty years, even a bad, rather sloppy reporter, had sharpened her powers of observation. His accent told her that he was an Easterner, and when he said, "Thank you, ma'am," like an ordinary tramp, the speech didn't quite ring true. It was more as if he were an actor, and a ham actor at that, repeating lines.

"Well," she thought, philosophically, "if he wants to be taken up, it's his business. I guess he doesn't know how tough we are on tramps here in the West." She was a little troubled, too, by a suspicion that she had made a fool of herself and that even now the young man was chuckling at her expense.

## 5

Old Dougherty's office was on the top floor of the building which bore his name, the one skyscraper in all Platteville which you could see ten miles out on the plains, if the day was clear. On the glass door were printed the words, "W. M. Dougherty and Son, Contractors." The "and Son" meant Jimmy Dougherty, who was running about with Jane. In a growing town they did a rousing enough business as contractors, but that, Mrs. McLeod knew, was not the source of most of their fat income. It came from graft, from protection paid by people like the poor women in the grim

houses along Franklin Street; from every sort of petty political corruption. Old Dougherty had the Democratic party in the palm of his hand, and in Plattesville the Democratic party was practically everything.

As she climbed the stairs, a little wearily, she thought again how fine it would be to start a crusade and clean up Plattesville, to smash the machine of Old Dougherty and throw him out of control. She was always reading about editors in other parts of America who started crusades and cleaned up towns. Vaguely she thought of medals and prizes given to editors for services to their own towns. It was all something she dreamed of, something she thought of in the nights when she lay awake unable to sleep. But her hard, common sense always answered her: "You can't get away with that with nothing but an old-fashioned, out-of-date machine like the *Daily Shield and Banner*. You have to have a lot of money and a lot of energy and a lot of influence and I haven't got any of those things. You're old and tired and mortgaged up to the hilt."

Sometimes when she felt especially well and strong there were moments when she dreamed of the novel solving everything. She saw what Aida always called "The Book" finished and sold to a publisher. She saw it sweeping the country like wildfire. She remembered vague tales of the fortunes authors made by selling stories to movie producers. In an occasional excess of health she sometimes even went so far as to cover pages of copy paper with figures based on the hypothetical fortune "The Book" would bring her. With money which did not exist she bought new linotype machines, repaired the old-fashioned press that was always breaking down, gave McLeod's Folly a good double coat of

paint and brought in two or three “investigators” to help her in the crusade against Old Dougherty.

But when the excess of health and spirits had passed, she knew that all the dream was nonsense and all the figures rubbish. No matter what Aida said about the parts that had been read to her, the novel was old-fashioned and too long, and anyway in these times nobody would be interested in the history of a pioneer family. Worse than that, she knew, in the shyness which had tormented her since she was a girl about anything which she herself had done, that she would never have the courage to send away to any publisher that mountain of manuscript that filled the old cowhide trunk in the attic of McLeod’s Folly. No publisher would even trouble to read it through to the end.

## 6

In his office Old Dougherty was dictating two or three letters to wind up the week’s work before he went fishing. He was a big red-faced man with a bull neck, the shoulders of a wrestler and tiny Irish blue eyes. His hair was pepper and salt, and coarse black hair covered the backs of his big hands. He was an ugly man, a kind of Iberian aboriginal out of the bogs of Ireland, but there was a kind of magnificence in the animal strength of his healthy body, and now and then there came into the small blue eyes a twinkle which disarmed even his worst enemy. And he was an actor by temperament, one of those flamboyant actors who, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, toured opera houses and auditoriums throughout the West, playing wild and sentimental Irish melodrama.

When the office boy came in to announce the presence of Mrs. McLeod he hesitated for a moment, thinking, and then said to his secretary, "I suppose I might as well see her and get it over with. Tell her to come in and then you can go home."

He knew her well enough. She had come to see him before, now and then, when she wanted a bit of information about street improvements or the plans of the Dougherty wing of the local Democratic party. He had hesitated not because he was afraid of her—what reason was there for a man with all his power to be afraid of a funny old thing with a dying newspaper like the *Daily Shield and Banner*? He was not afraid of her, but she had a way of making him feel vaguely uncomfortable which, for all his shrewdness, he could not quite understand. She belonged, he knew, to a vanishing world. She was respectable and a little fantastic. She had integrity and tenacity. But these were not reasons why the lined face and clear blue eyes beneath the funny plumed bonnet should always make him squirm a little inside himself. He was cynical in all his dishonesty, telling himself that if he didn't get the graft, someone else would, so it was not his conscience that was stirred by the sight of Mrs. McLeod. Partly perhaps it was because she was a woman—a woman who was plain and old now but who had once been pretty, perhaps even beautiful. If the editor of the *Daily Shield and Banner* had been a man, Old Dougherty would have given him a cigar, slapped him on the back and sent him away loaded with bilge instead of information. But a woman like Mrs. McLeod?

The door opened and she came in, shyly, stopping for a moment in the doorway and peering at Old Dougherty's

heavy, coarse figure sprawled in the swivel chair.

“Good morning, Mrs. McLeod. Come in and sit down. What can I do for you?”

She came over and sat down and suddenly she could not think why she had come here or what it was she had meant to ask of him. On the way from Jim Newman’s, she had gathered up her courage and decided to ask him directly why the new waterworks were taking so long and why it cost so much. And she thought of asking outright why the new lights along Hillyard Street had never been installed. And she had meant to protest about the brutality of the police and the magistrate toward vagrants whose numbers, in spite of everything, went on increasing.

But now all the questions quite flew out of her head. She saw that the proper source of information on these subjects was the Mayor and the City Council and that that was the only answer she would get from Old Dougherty. It didn’t matter that he knew the answers better than the Mayor or the City Council or anyone in Plattesville and that she knew that he knew them. She understood now that if she asked such questions he would treat her like the fool she was. And something in the sight of his big body and corrupt, heavy, masculine face made her feel helpless and feminine. She knew that feeling all too well: more than once it had betrayed her. If it hadn’t been for that feeling, she would have been a better newspaperwoman and a better editor.

Now she sat quietly on the edge of the chair and said feebly, “There wasn’t anything special. I just dropped in on a chance that you might have a bit of news.” And suddenly she found herself flattering this corrupt bullying man whom her whole nature held in contempt. She heard herself, with



shame, saying, "I think editors should keep more in touch with important men in the town."

Old Dougherty grinned. "Thanks, Mrs. McLeod, for the compliment." He took the cigar out of his mouth and turning in his swivel chair, shouted, "Jimmy, come in here a minute." Then to her he said, "Jimmy knows more about what's going on than I do. I've kind of retired from things."

A voice from the next room called back, "I'm on the telephone. In a minute."

And Old Dougherty turned to Mrs. McLeod with a kind of leer and said, "That's a mighty pretty cousin you've got working for you on the *Shield*."

"It's a niece," said Mrs. McLeod, "my niece, Hally Baldwin's daughter. Hally was a McLeod. J. E.'s sister." And then she was aware that all this family history couldn't mean much to a newcomer to the county like Old Dougherty, and she felt a fool all over again.

"Sweet girl, too," he said. "Jimmy has taken kind of a shine to her. Brought her to the Elks' dance Saturday. We had a couple of beers together."

Mrs. McLeod experienced a kind of sick feeling in her stomach. Jane hadn't told her about the Elks' dance. The thing must have gone farther than she knew.

Weakly she said, "Yes, she was educated in the East at Wellesley."

"Too bad you haven't got a good man in your office to liven up the *Shield* a bit. Never thought about selling it, have you?"

She felt her cheeks growing hot. He was patronizing her now, treating her as if she were a comic town character. She

said, “No, I don’t expect I’ll ever want to sell it. When J. E. died, I promised I’d keep it going.”

He crushed out the end of his cigar and lighted a fresh one. “Well, if ever you think about selling it, let me know. I’d kind of like to own a newspaper. I’ve got a big interest in the *News*, but I’d like to own a newspaper outright. I’ve been thinking about it lately. Anyway, there’s too many newspapers in Plattsville for a town this size.”

She felt suddenly weak because for the first time it occurred to her definitely, as a fact, that some day if things kept on going the way they were going, she might *have to* sell the *Daily Shield and Banner* at a forced sale and then this old monster could buy it at his own price. The *Daily Shield and Banner*, J. E.’s paper which he had loved so much, the paper that had always belonged to the McLeods, going to Old Dougherty!

Then the door opened and young Jim Dougherty came in. She had known him, vaguely, ever since he was a little boy. She had seen him about town, growing up, seen him when he came home from the State University, seen him now and then at political meetings, but she understood suddenly as he came in the door that she had never really seen him at all until this moment, because always before he had simply been one of Plattsville’s forty thousand citizens, and now she was seeing him as Jane’s “young man.”

What she saw was a young man who was an improvement on Old Dougherty, an improvement even on what Old Dougherty must have been before he grew heavy and gross and hairy. He was tall and wiry, with wavy black hair and Irish blue eyes and he wore his clothes well. And there was an engaging frankness about his grin as he came toward her.

At sight of him she thought, “Well, I can’t well blame Jane.” His mouth was perhaps a little too sensual and the angle of his jaw was so sharp as to give an impression of willfulness that might approach cruelty. And perhaps he was a little too sure of himself and had an indefinable commonness. But there was no denying that he was handsome and personable.

He said, “Good morning, Mrs. McLeod,” and crossed the room to shake hands with her. “We don’t see you very often.”

“I called you in to see if you might know some news for Mrs. McLeod,” said Old Dougherty.

Jimmy Dougherty grinned, “Don’t know of much happening that you or Jane don’t pick up. I pass along to Jane whatever I hear.”

“Yes, so she tells me,” said Mrs. McLeod, lying. Jane had never told her anything of the kind, but she had to say it in self-defense, especially as both men seemed to regard Jane already as one of the family. She couldn’t let them think that Jane hadn’t told her everything.

“Still,” said Jimmy, “there’s the annual barbecue of the Democratic Club. We’re making great plans. You could get out a good half a column about that.” He turned and said, “Wait a minute, I’ll get you a copy of the program.” In a second he was back with a carbon copy. “This year it’s going to be at Millersville. There’s going to be prizes for the most fish and the biggest fish caught and a gold cup for the prettiest baby and a bathing beauty contest, free bus service—and a lot of other things. The biggest ever!”

She took the paper, folded it and put it into her bag. Then she rose, still with an odd feeling that they were treating her as a kindly old fool. “I guess I’d better not keep you any longer,” she said, timidly.

“Drop in any time,” said Old Dougherty, as he rose and went to the door with her. “Always glad to see you.”

When the door was closed the father and son looked at each other, grinning.

“Might as well be kind to the old fool,” said Dougherty, “it ain’t much trouble and it’s better to have her on our side. Even that old rag of hers might stir up trouble.”

“Anyway,” said Jimmy, “she’s gonna be in the family before long.”

“Has that girl said yes?”

“Not yet, but she will.”

“Well, don’t go getting her into trouble like that Ritchie girl.”

“Hot chance, even if I wanted to,” Jimmy grinned. “You don’t know that girl.”

## 7

Mrs. McLeod left the Dougherty Block with a feeling of depression. Although the sun was shining—that great sun of the Southwest, sometimes so kindly and benevolent, sometimes so fierce and relentless—she was not aware of it. If you had asked her if the day was bright she would have told you that the sky was overcast and there was no sun, for in her spirit, her own sun had gone out. She was ashamed of her own femininity and weakness, ashamed that somehow the Doughertys, father and son, had made her seem a fool. She had never been any good at dealing with people who were crooked and ruthless; they made her feel foolish, and her own mind immediately became incapable of coping with them. Again and again she had told herself, “You must fight fire

with fire. It takes a thief to catch a thief!” But whenever she attempted Machiavellian methods they failed, leaving her stranded and a little ridiculous. Long ago it hadn’t mattered so much, but now the failure made her seem old and tired and discouraged. And she was ashamed of having been so weak and feminine as to like such a scamp as Jimmy Dougherty when she saw him with Jane’s eyes.

She had left McLeod’s Folly intending to go to see Gashouse Mary down on Franklin Street, but now as she walked along Main Street, scarcely seeing the people who smiled and bowed to her as she passed, it seemed a useless thing to do. What good was it to try to discover evidence of the Doughertys’ wrongdoing when the Doughertys had only to talk with her for ten minutes to muddle and defeat her.

She would have abandoned the project but for Gashouse Mary herself. In spite of everything she had always liked Mary. There was a kind of strength in her, a sense of reality, uncontaminated by cynicism, from which she herself drew strength. Gashouse Mary, she thought, wasn’t a silly vaporous romantic like herself, writing novels and hiding them away timidly in trunks in the attic. Gashouse Mary was always down to brass tacks.

And Gashouse Mary might have news, the kind of underground news which you couldn’t find elsewhere in Plattsville.

So when she reached the corner she found herself, almost without knowing it, turning down the hill toward the river and Franklin Street. With each step in the direction of the river the street grew a little more shabby, a little less well-kept, a little more sordid. Even the trees seemed more tired

and discouraged than the sycamores, the oaks and the cottonwoods higher up in the town.

Franklin Street lay along the river, a short street only three blocks long, in a district which in one spring out of three was flooded when the river, fed by the last rains of winter, rose above the levees. The flood had just passed, leaving behind it a thick layer of mud which, drying, still filled the air with the heavy scent of fertility. Boards had been laid down to protect the high-heeled feet of the shady ladies of Franklin Street from the mud, and along these Mrs. McLeod made her way past the dozen or more houses, dingy and unpainted, with large windows on their façades. They were all shuttered and closed now; they would, Mrs. McLeod knew, come to life after sundown. Then the dreariness of Franklin Street, concealed by the darkness, would change to noise and lights and frantic gayety, with the sound of mechanical pianos filtering out from behind closed windows.

The last house in the street was different from the others for two reasons; it had had a fresh coat of white and yellow paint and at one side there was joined to it a large flat structure, one story high, bearing across the front both in enormous painted letters and in electric lights, the name: EL DORADO BAR AND DANCE PALACE. The house itself was of the same fancy architectural epoch as the other houses, the same in fact as the vast bulk of McLeod's Folly itself, but it made no effort at concealing itself or hiding behind shutters. This was because Gashouse Mary, its proprietor, was the only tenant in the block who operated within the law. For Mrs. McLeod the sight of the low flat building with the legend EL DORADO BAR AND DANCE HALL always roused to life a long chain of memories; it carried her back to the days of her

childhood when Plattessville was a wide-open frontier town and there had been a dance hall called the El Dorado on the Main Street where the Dougherty Block now stood—a dance hall with a hitching rail in front of it, lined with ponies of the cattlemen. Gashouse Mary was the daughter of the proprietor of the original El Dorado. She had carried on the tradition in another day in another part of the town.

Mrs. McLeod crossed the mud-soaked front yard on a walk made of boards and rang the bell, not without a stirring of excitement in her heart. There was something about the whole district and about Gashouse Mary's place, something free and wild and unrestrained, that never failed to touch the romantic in her. As a little girl waiting in a buckboard for her father outside the Ranchers' Bank, she had listened to the singing and shouting and wild music that came out of the original El Dorado on Main Street: and afterward, throughout her life, she had known moments when she experienced a fierce longing to see, just for one night, what life was like behind the swinging doors of such a place. But she had never been able to see it at first hand. As a young girl it would have been unthinkable for her to visit such a place, and after she was married it became even more impossible as the wife of J. E. McLeod, first citizen and owner and publisher of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. In spite of being a newspaperwoman and the owner of a newspaper, she could never quite escape the mold of the old-fashioned Southern lady.

So, when the door opened and she found Gashouse Mary's colored parlormaid, Minnie, not yet dressed for the evening but wearing a faded gray wrapper and carpet slippers, her heart leaped with excitement at the glimpse of what life was like inside a place like the El Dorado.

She said, "Good morning, Minnie; is Mrs. McGovern up yet?"

"She's just gettin' up," said Minnie. "Come right in."

"I don't want to disturb her."

"You ain't disturbin' her," said Minnie. "She's always glad to see you all. And how's Aida?"

"Aida is fine," said Mrs. McLeod, now inside the hall.

"Give her my respects," said Minnie. "She doan speak to me no more since I'm workin' in Franklin Street."

"Aida is kind of peculiar," said Mrs. McLeod kindly.

Minnie opened a door and showed Mrs. McLeod into Gashouse Mary's parlor, saying, "You all just wait here." In the doorway she turned. "Maybe you all would like some beer or some coffee?"

"Some coffee, Minnie."

"Mrs. McGovern'll be right down."

"Thank you, Minnie."

She had seen the room in which she was sitting many times before. Ever since she had found it impossible to send poor broken-down, drunken old Willie Ferguson into the district and had taken to coming herself, she had always come to Gashouse Mary's for news and had been received as a refined and superior visitor in the parlor. It was a big room with an ornate mantelpiece full of pigeonholes, each containing a bit of hand-painted china. Plumes of dusty pampas grass stood before the mirror, and opposite there was a portrait of Knobby McGovern, the third-rate prize fighter, who for twenty years had been Gashouse Mary's husband and chucker-out wherever she had a bar and dance hall. The portrait was an enlarged photograph, hand-tinted, of a man



with huge mustaches, cauliflower ears and a flat nose, with a wistful expression in the blue eyes. Mrs. McLeod had never seen him, but she liked his looks. He looked like a lot of the men she had seen in her childhood along Main Street.

The rest of the room was crowded with furniture, furniture which was very like that in the parlor of McLeod's Folly—gilt chairs and a loveseat, a vast black walnut sofa and a carved teakwood table with a plush cover, an album and a dusty palm. The whole room was now veiled in the feeble light which came through the cracks of the closed shutters.

Minnie returned in a little while, bringing in coffee and hot buttered toast, and while Mrs. McLeod ate and drank, her spirits began to rise again and her romantic imagination to work furiously.

What, she asked herself, had happened in this funny shuttered room? Whom, besides herself, had Gashouse Mary received here? What had Mr. McGovern really been like, with his battered face and his mild childlike too-blue eyes? But most of all, she kept asking herself just how bad Gashouse Mary was. Her house wasn't like the others in the street. Ostensibly it was a dance hall operated with a license: and yet ...

The neighborhood was unsavory and she couldn't make herself believe that Gashouse Mary, for all her friendly manners, hadn't a finger in other pies besides the dance hall. There was, she was certain, some understanding between Gashouse Mary and Old Dougherty. Slowly her indignation began to rise again, and with it the old desire to overthrow Old Dougherty and expose him. It might be just possible that Gashouse Mary could give her aid and information. There

was only one thing to do and that was to take her courage in both hands and put it directly to Mary.

She had just finished her coffee when the heavy walnut door opened and Gashouse Mary came in. She was a big woman, so big and powerful that in the underworld of Memphis and Natchez and New Orleans there was a legend that in her prime she had acted as her own chucker-out. There were stories that the battered appearance of the late McGovern had come about as much from Mary's prowess as from his ill-starred fistic career. There was something grand about her even now as a woman in her sixties, entering the darkened respectable middle-class parlor. She was magnificent and impressive. Something came into the room with her—something big and wild and full of vitality. She was dressed in a peignoir of purple cut-plush and was wearing red mules trimmed with ostrich feathers. Her figure, corseted very high in an old-fashioned way, was full to overflowing. Her hair was mahogany red and her coiffure was, even at this early hour of the morning, an intricate and elaborate affair of coils, rolls and knots, fastened at the top with a tortoise-shell comb studded with brilliants. About the whole picture there was an air of something splendid and indefatigable, a remnant of those earlier days when Plattessville had been a wide-open town.

Now she smiled, showing her fine double row of false teeth and said, "Good morning, Mrs. McLeod." Mrs. McLeod put down her cup, rose a little, timidly, and said, "Good morning, Mary."

Long ago on Saturdays, when Mrs. McLeod was a little girl, waiting for her father to finish his business before driving back to the ranch, she and Mary had played together

in the little square of open land in front of the El Dorado Dance Hall. The little square was a park row, with a soldiers' and sailors' monument in the midst of cottonwood trees, and she and Mary were well past sixty. She always called Mary by her Christian name as she had done long ago, but ever since Mary had returned from her wanderings in the great world, she had always addressed her childhood playmate as "Mrs. McLeod." This troubled Mrs. McLeod, but she never complained of it for fear of embarrassing Mary.

Mary said, "Why didn't that dumb Minnie open the shutters? You can't see to get the cup up to your mouth." And with that she pushed up the windows and flung back the shutters with a vigor that raised a clatter to be heard the whole length of Franklin Street.

Then she seated herself and offered Mrs. McLeod a cigarette. Mrs. McLeod did not as a rule smoke because it gave her no pleasure and cost money that was needed to keep the *Daily Shield and Banner* alive and pay the devouring interest of the mortgages that encumbered McLeod's Folly, but she always smoked when she came to see Gashouse Mary, because it seemed to bring the two of them nearer together.

"And how have you been?" asked Mary.

"Very well."

"And the *Daily Shield and Banner*?"

"Pretty well."

Gashouse Mary detected in the voice of her friend a shadow of weariness and despair and said, "What you need for that paper, Mrs. McLeod, is some new blood. Neither of us is as young as we once were."

“Where am I going to get it?”

“Well, that’s kind of hard to answer. Too bad you never had any children to carry it on.” And then, fearful that she might have hurt Mrs. McLeod’s sensibilities, she quickly added, “I never had any either—anyway none that lived. But I guess if you haven’t got ’em you just have to carry on by yourself.”

“My niece Jane has come to work on the *Shield*.”

“Yes, I’ve seen her in the street. Looks to me like an uppity young woman.”

“She was educated in the East, but she doesn’t mean to be uppity.”

“What you need is a good tough, two-fisted young fella that knows his business.”

“Yes, I guess so.”

There was an awkward silence and then Gashouse Mary said, “I ain’t got any news for you this week. Nothing much has happened down here on the line.”

Mrs. McLeod coughed and then plunged. “It wasn’t news I was worrying about,” she said. “It was something else.” Then she came to a dead halt.

“Well, what is it?” asked Mary. “I guess you don’t need to mince words with me.”

“Well,” said Mrs. McLeod, “I’ve been thinking and it seems to me that this town is due for a good clean-up.”

“You said it,” said Mary. “But how?”

Mrs. McLeod’s hands were trembling now. “Well, I thought I might start a crusade in the *Daily Shield and Banner*—you know, exposure and facts, etc.... about graft and how the taxpayers’ money is wasted.”

“You mean attack Old Dougherty and his gang?”

“Yes, I guess it would have to be that.”

Gashouse Mary grinned. It was a hard grin full of false teeth and experience and knowledge of a corrupt world which had never been quite able to defeat her because she was a realist and took no chances; she had never been a romantic like Mrs. McLeod.

“Who’s gonna do it? You and your uppity cousin and old drunken Willie Ferguson?”

“Well, I thought I might get others to help—honest citizens like you and me who are scandalized by the open goings-on.”

“Yeah?” asked Mary. “I’ve found out it’s no good depending on honest citizens unless you’ve got something to offer ’em. Get a good leader and a good organization and they’ll follow—mebbe. I’ve been through plenty of clean-up campaigns up and down the Mississippi River, but damned few of ’em ever came to much. Just when you need ’em most, the good citizens back down. I’ve always kept inside the law because I’ve found it paid better, cost less in money and trouble. So nobody’s ever been able to chase me out of anywhere. I’d like a clean-up myself. I’ve got plenty to settle with Old Dougherty, and there ain’t anything he can do to me by law ... not a damned thing.”

Mrs. McLeod drew a deep breath. “You mean that you’d be willing to help?”

“Sure I’d be willing if we had the right outfit. You can’t ask the *Daily News* to help. It’s in Old Dougherty’s pocket. And it ain’t much use going to Hoppins up in the *Chronicle* when he owns half the property here on the line. It’s always the same story. I’ve been through a lot of clean-ups. Most of the time the crooks are too well organized, and most of the

town don't want to be cleaned up for fear it might lose a little dough in the process."

Mrs. McLeod didn't say anything and Gashouse Mary warmed further to her subject. "I don't say there ain't a lot of unsavory people down here by the river, but they ain't as bad as the crooks that live off 'em. Right now I'm paying money to that outfit."

"How?" asked Mrs. McLeod. "Your business is legal."

"A hell of a lot of difference that makes to Old Dougherty." She caught herself and said, "Excuse my language, Mrs. McLeod, but it burns me up."

"Sure," said Mrs. McLeod. "But tell me how?"

Gashouse Mary drew her chair nearer to Mrs. McLeod. "If I tell you," she said, "you'll have to give me your word not to use it in the paper. A woman in my position can't afford to get in wrong with Old Dougherty—anyway, not unless we had an outfit strong enough to lick him."

"Of course what you say is confidential."

"Because," said Gashouse Mary, "if you did print it, I'd just deny I ever told you anything." She lighted another cigarette and said, "You see, I always liked Plattesville ever since I was a kid, and when poor McGovern died I decided to clear out of New Orleans and come up here and open a bar and dance hall like Pappy had. I thought it would be a good idea to spend my old age here." Again she glanced at Mrs. McLeod and said, "I've always kept orderly places within the law and that's what the El Dorado is. It ain't in a very nice part of town, but nobody can say it ain't run right."

She blew rings of smoke for a moment as if hesitating whether to go on. After a time she said, "Old Dougherty's

been collecting protection money right along from Mamie Furnoy and Estelle Laverne and the other girls down here, and as soon as I opened the El Dorado one of his guys came to me and proposed that I make a weekly contribution to the City Orphans' Fund—that's what this particular graft is called. So I said, 'Why? I don't need protection. The El Dorado is a straight bar and dance hall. What do I need protection for?' Well, he went away and a couple of nights later a lot of bums turned up in the El Dorado, started a fight and smashed about two hundred dollars' worth of furniture and glass. I sent Minnie for the cop on the beat and called up headquarters, but the cop on the beat wasn't there and by the time the cops from headquarters came, the bums had disappeared. That kind of thing never happened in a place of mine before, but it happened again the next week and the next and then I got word from the Mayor, who is just Old Dougherty's stooge, that if it happened again, he'd have to close the El Dorado as a public nuisance."

Again she was silent, her face now bright red with anger and indignation. Mrs. McLeod asked, "What did you do?"

"What did I do?" asked Gashouse Mary. "The next time Old Dougherty's man called on me, I made a fat contribution to the Orphans' Fund." She crushed out her cigarette. "It burns me up," she said. "In the old days when you and I were kids, Mrs. McLeod, they used to call Plattessville a wide-open town full of bad men, but it was a kindergarten compared to this town now. Every place you turn, some guy from Dougherty's crowd has got a hand held out. It's a damned shame, that's what it is—to see a fine town like Plattessville spoiled by a gang of crooked politicians. Something ought to be done about it, but who's gonna do it?"

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. McLeod weakly. “I wish J. E. was still alive.”

Then for a time Gashouse Mary and the editor of the *Daily Shield and Banner* sat silent and brooding. They were both thinking about the old days during the land rush when there wasn’t any Dougherty Block on Main Street and when there was a row of saloons and dance halls opposite the Park and a vigilant committee which gave everybody a square deal. In their memories McLeod, the late J. E. McLeod, came alive again, tough, honest, a valiant citizen struck down in his prime by death. J. E. would have fixed Old Dougherty and his gang in no time. But what could his widow do, with no money and only herself and old drunken Willie and Jane?

At last she said, “Well, you think, Mary, and I’ll think, and maybe we can find some way of fighting them.”

“Think?” said Mary. “I’ve been thinking of nothing else except clearing out of Plattesville for a decent town. Only I never been licked yet and I don’t want to be now.”

Suddenly Mrs. McLeod felt a wave of affection for Gashouse Mary and her valiance. They belonged to a day when life had been simple, direct and full of savor. Then suddenly she saw with a sense of despair that Gashouse Mary was, like herself, a relic, a left-over. For a second she even saw that Mary and herself must seem awfully funny to most people in Plattesville, curiosities to the younger ones of the place.

She sighed and rose. “Well, Mary, if that’s all the news you’ve got, I’ll be going.”

“That’s all,” said Mary, “and mind you don’t even print a hint of what I told you.”

“I promised you.”



They moved together toward the huge walnut doors.

“Drop in any time. I usually sleep until about ten-thirty, but after that I’m on my feet. It’s an awful job running a place like this all alone. I never knew what a help McGovern was until he died.”

They passed into the hall and Gashouse Mary went with her to the door. As she stood in the full light from the outside she seemed, despite her handsome, tight-corseted physique, despite the dyed hair with its complicated coils and studded comb, despite the rouge and powder, to turn old and tired and raddled.

“Give my best to Willie Ferguson,” she said. “I miss him down here, but for Gawd’s sake don’t tell him that, or he’ll be wantin’ to come down here again.”

“Okay,” said Mrs. McLeod.

## 8

The courthouse was a depressing building constructed in the eighties in that same gaudy once-fashionable style as the houses in Franklin Street and McLeod’s Folly itself. Two years earlier it had had a bright, shiny, new copper roof out of which Old Dougherty had made ten thousand dollars. Through it passed the official life of the whole county, and as Mrs. McLeod entered its ill-lighted corridors smelling of stale tobacco smoke and spittoons, she was greeted by cattlemen and ranchers come into town to pay taxes or register deeds or check up on boundary lines. Most of them stopped to chat, addressing her as “Mrs. McLeod” and sometimes as “Vinnie.” They exchanged gossip and hearty handshakes and three or four invited her “out to the place” to

spend a week or two. But she had to decline their invitations, saying that she would like nothing better but that she was busy all the week with the *Daily Shield and Banner* and on Sundays she was too tired and had to wash her hair and do a little house cleaning.

They delayed her progress so that by the time she reached the magistrate's court old Judge Flynn had already gone. With the clerk she went over the morning's record, thankful in her heart that she hadn't been there to witness the hearings which were recorded simply and sordidly in the book of the clerk. There wasn't news in any of the cases—just a dreary record of drunkenness, wife-beating, adultery, petty thievery, and at the end, three cases of “vagrancy,” which meant three more jailed workers whose pay Old Dougherty would draw. When she had written down the simple facts she put her copy paper and pencil back into the bag, snapped it shut, thanked the clerk and left.

Then she passed through the ornate doorway, out of the musty corridor and crossed the street to the police station. Here, as in the courthouse, she was allowed all the privileges of a newspaperwoman. She knew all the “boys” and liked most of them. The Chief, Harvey Bingham, was, she knew, crooked or he wouldn't have kept his job, but outside of that he was a good fellow and kindly enough and he had eight children to support. She liked Harvey Bingham; she had known him always, and before him his father and mother. He belonged to the county; he wasn't a newcomer like Old Dougherty and most of his gang, bringing corruption with him. Harvey, she told herself, wasn't naturally crooked, he was just easy-going. If Old Dougherty and his gang hadn't

spread their net over the whole town, Harvey would have been just a simple straight citizen.

She found him in the room where prisoners were brought in to have their records taken down, sitting with his feet up on the desk. When she came in he said, "Hello, Vinnie," put down his feet and added, "How's things?"

"The same."

Two other policemen greeted her, grinning a little as they always did at the sight of her thin figure, her wispy hair and her old-fashioned clothes.

"I was just going to eat," said the Chief. "Anything I can do for you?"

"I was just looking for news."

"Ain't none around here but the same old stuff."

She went over to the record and began looking through it. The Chief stood up, put on his hat and said, "Well, Vinnie, if there ain't anything I can do, I'll run along and get me something to eat."

"Okay," said Mrs. McLeod, without looking up.

She went on copying the record. She heard the door close and then, after a time, open again and was aware, without looking up, that a policeman had come in with a prisoner. Automatically one of the other policemen seated himself at the table beside her, opened a book and took up a pen. There was nothing new in all this. Because she had stayed so long talking with Gashouse Mary she was late already and the Saturday evening edition with all the county correspondence was always a bother. She went on writing, scarcely hearing the answers to the questions asked for the record.

Vaguely she heard the name “Thomas Richardson” and the address “New York,” age “twenty-nine,” born “Boston, Massachusetts,” business or profession, “newspaperman,” charge, “vagrancy.”

At the words “newspaperman” she looked up and there before her, looking down at the policeman who was writing in the book, she saw the young man she had left standing by the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Fountain. She thought, “The damned fool! I told him if he hung around there he’d be picked up,” but at the same time she couldn’t really make herself feel irritated at him. Now, in profile, he seemed to resemble J. E. scarcely at all, but he was none the less the kind of young man for whom she had always had a fancy, ever since she was a young girl. There was something about the set of the shoulders and the square angle of the jaw which made her feel very feminine, and for thirty years now, Vinnie McLeod, the most feminine of Southern ladies, had had to run a newspaper and compete with men and pretend she was a man. There were plenty of men, even Old Dougherty for example, who had square jaws and broad shoulders, but this young man had something else—something which J. E. had had—a quietness about him which gave the shoulders and the jaw an augmented attraction. It was that quietness which had made it possible in the old days for J. E., unarmed, to dominate a whole barroom full of brawling gamblers and frontiersmen. That was what made this young man seem like J. E.—it wasn’t really that he looked so much like the husband who had been dead for thirty years. It was the quietness.

While she was watching him, he turned, and recognizing her, grinned and said, “Hello.” It was a friendly, almost

affectionate grin, the kind of grin she might have expected from her own son if she had had one.

“Hello,” she said and with her eyes tried to say, “I told you so.”

The man at the desk looked up and said, “Do you know the prisoner, Mrs. McLeod?”

Quickly she said, “No. Only he touched me for a quarter this morning.”

“You oughta have turned him in.”

“I guess I didn’t have time,” said Mrs. McLeod. “I was in a hurry.” She blushed suddenly and bent her head again over her copy paper.

With a kind of malice the policeman at the desk said to the prisoner, “Well, it looks like you’ll have to spend Sunday in the calaboose. It’s Saturday and there ain’t any more court till Monday.”

The young man did not answer him and Mrs. McLeod knew that both policemen felt malice toward him because he was young and good-looking, and because of the way he held himself, and because you could see at a glance that he was no fool. There was something pugnacious and challenging about him, in the very way he held himself, a kind of defiance and contempt which Mrs. McLeod knew would do him no good in Plattesville. And the quietness made his manner seem worse. It put an extra edge on the defiance and contempt. The two policemen were grinning as if they thought, “We’ll soon take that cockiness out of you, young fella. This town is famous for taking the freshness out of guys like you.”

“Take him away, Jim, and lock him up,” said the policeman at the book.

Mrs. McLeod looked up and almost spoke. She wanted to say, "Let me speak to the prisoner for a moment," but quickly she stopped herself, thinking, "If I talked to him they might get a suspicion about the men in the cellar, and then all that would be spoiled." She wanted to ask if she could send him books or something special to eat from Aida's kitchen, but she dared not risk it.

When the policeman had led him away to a cell she asked, "Where did they pick him up?"

The policeman at the desk grinned. "In the park by the Memorial Fountain. He practically asked to be picked up. He walked straight into Sam Hildreth's arms. He must be a hell of a sap, hanging around the center of a town like Platteville. Acts to me as if he was a little goofy."

Mrs. McLeod put away her copy paper and pencil and snapped shut the voluminous bag. No, he wasn't goofy certainly, but she couldn't make him out.

"We'll take care of him," said the policeman. "Looks to me like he's pretty husky. We need guys like him to wrestle garbage cans and dig that new Bellmore Avenue sewer."

All the way back to the office Mrs. McLeod couldn't get the young man out of her mind. It would be a pity to see such a nice-looking young man digging sewers for two months.

## 9

It was after one o'clock when Mrs. McLeod reached the office of the Platteville *Daily Shield and Banner* and went through the door past the grill where Willie Ferguson's wife Myrtle sat to register subscriptions and accept the rare money which was paid in for advertisements. The cashier was a chill

and angular woman filled with the unassailable egotistical integrity of the woman of her day. She wore an old-fashioned white shirtwaist with a high collar, a skirt with pockets in it, and over her arms from the wrist to the elbows, sleeve guards of black alpaca. On the ridge of her narrow Roman nose dangled uncertainly a pair of pince-nez which were attached by a gold chain to a button fastened to the shirtwaist. These were of use to her only when regarding figures and accounts; talking to a subscriber or an advertiser she was forced to tilt her head forward and look over the glasses.

At the sight of Mrs. McLeod entering the office flushed and distracted, Myrtle Ferguson simply said, "Good afternoon," in a clipped, pettish fashion, but by the tone of her voice she managed to say a great deal more. She said without saying it, "William's and my pay is two weeks behind. The gas company wants to be paid. I haven't been able to get a cent out of old Weissman on his account. And I suppose you've been gallivanting around Plattesville with some crazy new idea in your head."

But Mrs. McLeod, thankful that she said all this only by intimation, hurried past lest Myrtle should change her mind and become more articulate. She was thankful too when she reached the back stairway leading to the composing room, and the door banged behind her, leaving Myrtle to her sour reflections.

The *Daily Shield and Banner* occupied the same building constructed for it at the time of its founding, seventy years earlier, by J. E.'s father. Bigger, more modern and more prosperous buildings had grown up round it facing on the square—buildings which squeezed the little two-story red-brick structure in the relentless embrace of an inexorable

progress. About its façade with the big sign in dingy gold letters—"THE PLATTESVILLE DAILY SHIELD AND BANNER"—there was something quaint and sad. Clearly the structure belonged to another era; it stood among its more modern sisters a little like a belle of the sixties at a rowdy country club dance.

On the ground floor at the back of the business office the clumsy old-fashioned presses thumped and groaned in the late afternoon and on the floor above, the precious old linotype rattled away, melting, molding its miracle of print beside the racks of type where Zimmerman, the ancient compositor, picked and set and corrected from nine in the morning to six at night.

In the front of the building on the second floor overlooking the square there was a big room with a cubbyhole built of matchboarding in the corner. This was the sanctum sanctorum of Mrs. McLeod, from which she directed the destinies of the *Daily Shield and Banner* in her vague distracted way. Here she received complaints and attempted to keep accounts which in thirty years had never once balanced properly. In the large room outside there were rows of cupboards filled with ancient dusty files of paper, and a long table on which were kept daily copies of the *New York Times* and the *New Tribune*, the *Kansas City Star* and the *St. Louis Post Despatch*, all papers which J. E. had admired and which provided the *Daily Shield and Banner*, a day or two late, with most of its national and foreign news. On one side, against the wall, stood the desks of the remaining members of the staff—Mrs. McLeod's niece, Jane, and Willie Ferguson, the one as neat, as orderly, as clean as Jane herself, the other a confusion of clippings and copy paper, half-smoked cigars,



pencils, paste pots, paper clips and packages of chewing gum—for all the world like Willie.

The whole room had a smell of paste and dust and ancient tobacco smoke, tempered sometimes by a faint smell of lavatories or with a faint whiff of Bourbon from the bottle which Willie kept in the bottom drawer of his desk. It was a friendly, dirty place, reeking with the atmosphere of fifty years of old-fashioned intimate journalism.

Although the desks of Niece Jane and Willie Ferguson stood side by side, there was little communication between their two occupants. It was rare indeed that any word was spoken which had to do with anything save the pressing business of the paper itself. Jane thought the disorder of Willie's desk a disgrace and Willie himself a drunken old reprobate; and Willie, in his turn, thought Jane uppity with a whole set of cold-blooded efficient Yankee mannerisms picked up at school in the East. In his opinion—which he never hesitated to utter when the spirit and reinforcement from the Bourbon bottle moved him—the place for women, even Vinnie McLeod herself, was in the home and not in a rough place like a newspaper office where they were in daily contact with all sorts of sordid and unladylike facts which women were not supposed to know. He was old, Willie, and cantankerous and he had grown up in the grand tradition of Southern chivalry. It was his earnest belief that even the mother of ten children should never admit, even to her husband, that she suspected how it had all come about.

He did not like to hear words like “illegitimate” and “rape” and “criminal assault” in the mouth of a nice young woman like Niece Jane, and twice he had been caught by Mrs. McLeod suppressing stories in which such words occurred

simply so that they should not reach the eye or ear of Jane—an action symbolic of the unwelcome chivalry which Jane was determined should not be forced upon her. In his heart he had never forgiven J. E.'s widow for taking him off the Franklin Street round and herself going to see Gashouse Mary, and in his heart the resentment was born less of his own deprivation than of his horror at the picture of Lavinia McLeod and Gashouse Mary sitting down together for a chat in a house on Franklin Street.

He was a small man, very thin and wiry, with a mocking blue eye and large shaggy mustaches, who always had the air of being lost in his own clothes. In general, he was sour, with the agreeable sourness of a dill pickle, but there were moments when temper would rouse the small elderly figure into a rage which was more like the tantrum of a small child than the fury of a grown man.

When Mrs. McLeod pushed open the door from the composing room, she found the atmosphere of the editorial room charged with that unmistakable sense of strain that invariably followed a quarrel between Niece Jane and Willie Ferguson. There were two other more definite signs: Willie was reinforcing his temper with a generous swig from the bottle of Bourbon, and Jane had turned her chair so that she sat with her back directly to her enemy. Before her on the neat table stood a carton of coffee and a bag of sandwiches.

“You aren’t going out for lunch?” asked Mrs. McLeod.

“No, I’ve got to finish editing the county correspondence.”

Willie rose, pulled up his loose trousers, buttoned his shabby coat and said, “Well, I’m going to have some *hot* lunch. There’s nothing ruins the stomick quicker than slops and cold food.”

For a moment he stood looking at the back of Niece Jane with a faint expression of hope on the thin, discouraged face—hope that somehow he would goad her into answering back. But Jane gave no sign whatever of having heard his remark, and hope died out of Willie’s face to be replaced by that look of sour and humorous discouragement that was habitual. He could think of nothing better to do than to slam the door violently as he went out.

When he had gone Jane put down her pencil and said, “I don’t see why you keep that old drunk here.”

Mrs. McLeod said, “He’s not so bad.”

“He couldn’t be worse. He’s never sober. He can’t remember anything. He muddles every story and he gets on my nerves.”

“He worked for J. E. I can’t turn him out.”

Then for the first time Jane was rude to her Aunt Vinnie. She said, “The paper will never be any better so long as the office is filled with rubbish. It’ll just get worse and worse.”

Mrs. McLeod regarded her for a moment reproachfully. “What would happen to Willie if we turned him out? He can’t do anything else.”

“He could go to the county poor farm.”

“No, he couldn’t. It would kill Willie.” Jane was silent and Mrs. McLeod added, “And Myrtle. Think of Myrtle’s self-respect.”

Jane took up her pencil again and went back to her work but Mrs. McLeod remained there for a time standing behind her. At last she said, “You see, you don’t understand about Willie’s pride. You aren’t old enough yet, my dear, to know what Plattesville and the county used to be like.”

But Jane had nothing to say. She shrugged her shoulders and went on with her work. Her aunt went into the little sanctum and shut the door, the only sign of disapproval anyone in the office had ever known her to make. When Mrs. McLeod shut the door of her tiny office it meant that things were not going too well.

## 10

She hadn't shut the door because of what Jane had said about poor Willie; that she understood. She understood that Jane was young and ambitious and impatient, and had the hardness and intolerance of youth, and she understood that poor old drunken Willie was cantankerous and meddlesome and bitter at his own weakness and failure in life. You couldn't really blame him for the Bourbon bottle in the bottom drawer of his desk.

It was Jane herself who worried her—Jane and Jimmy Dougherty. She knew that Jane was having her lunch in the office because she wanted to get away early, and she divined that Jane was made irritable not by the childishness of Willie Ferguson but by that persistent bad conscience.

Mrs. McLeod was innocent of anything which might be called an intellectual process, but she had plenty of instinct. Muddled intellectually and over-emotional, she *knew* things about people without thinking them out. What troubled her most was the difficulty which she and Jane had in understanding each other. It wasn't, Mrs. McLeod saw, only the great difference in their ages but a difference in upbringing and generation and point of view. Jane and all her generation always made her feel shy and a little frightened. She could not quite understand what they meant when they

spoke of falling in love, and in her heart she could not quite see how any man could fall in love with anyone so hard and sure of herself as Jane seemed to be. She could see with her own eyes that Jane was pretty enough and even that there was something brilliant about her. A man would certainly be attracted by her fine complexion and her figure, but there were other things which mattered, perhaps even more than complexions and figures, in the long run. Love, for Mrs. McLeod, had always been something soft and tender with humility in it and adoration. And she could not see how any man could feel tenderness or adoration for anyone as pert and confident as Jane. And as for Jane's feeling tenderness or humility or adoration for any man, this to Mrs. McLeod was inconceivable. Jane, she knew, thought her old-fashioned and sentimental. Jane in her heart thought her a fool to have kept the *Daily Shield and Banner* going on year after year, ruining herself slowly, because she had loved a man who had been in his grave for thirty years. And Jane had hard, new, bright ideas, picked up, most of them, in the East, about woman's freedom and independence and what she called "a woman's right to her own life." Mrs. McLeod wasn't afraid of Jane's being seduced, even by a good-looking boy like Jimmy Dougherty with the reputation of being Plattesville's Don Juan. Jane would never get into trouble out of weakness. But she might get herself into trouble out of recklessness and defiance.

She felt that something must be done about Jane, that some warning must be given her out of her own long years of experience and watching the world about her, but how this was to be accomplished she had no idea, because whatever she said, Jane would simply think her an old fogey. What troubled her most was the fact that when Jimmy Dougherty

had come into the old man's office and she had seen him for the first time with the eyes of Jane, he had seemed to her, even in spite of her prejudice against the Doughertys and everything they stood for, a handsome, attractive and disarming young man. With the ghost of a blush she thought, "At her age I might have been seduced by a man like Jimmy Dougherty."

She might have sat there by her old-fashioned roll-top desk for hours staring out into the square seeing nothing, but for the tinkle of the telephone. Starting, she took up the receiver and heard a voice saying, "Is this Mrs. McLeod?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is Tom Higgins."

"Yes, Tom."

"Well, there's been a wreck on the P. and W. two miles beyond Spoonerville siding and I thought you'd want to know about it in time for the paper. It happened after Willie was here this morning."

"Anybody killed?"

"No, just a freight train. Engineer has a broken arm and fireman a broken leg."

"What's their names?"

"Don't know yet. I'll telephone you as soon as I find out."

"Thanks, Tom."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

The call cheered her a little without her knowing why. People all over town had a way of helping her out, people like Tom Higgins, the ticket agent of the P. and W. station, who called her up and told her news. They were really

reporters for the *Daily Shield and Banner* who never got any pay. They were always helping her out. That was something that Jane didn't understand—at least not yet. It was the kind of knowledge which came of age and experience. Jane didn't yet know that you get back from the world just as much as you give to it of friendliness, of generosity, of understanding.

Then her eye fell on the alarm clock which stood on the top of the roll-top desk and she saw that it was nearly two o'clock and that she had less than an hour to get in whatever news was to come out in the Saturday evening edition.

Opening her bag, she took out the sheets of copy paper covered with erratic, hastily written notes and turning J. E.'s ancient swivel-chair about she went to work picking out with one finger on the noisy old typewriter the news she had collected.

There wasn't much, nothing at all in fact save the records of the police station and the magistrate's court and what she had picked up at Jim Newman's funeral parlor. The longest bit she had to write was the story of the plans for the coming barbecue given by the Doughertys each year for the entertainment of their henchmen and their families. That occupied half a column which she needed to fill up the paper. Gashouse Mary's story, which would have shaken the town and started trouble, she had promised not to use. Depressed, she felt now that she would never be able to use it. She was too old and too tired and too silly. She had set out this very morning with vague ideas for starting a big clean-up campaign and she had returned to pound out on the typewriter nothing but the story of the barbecue which only helped the Doughertys instead of hurting them.

While she was finishing the barbecue story the telephone tinkled again and when she answered it, she heard the voice of Willie Ferguson. He had begun his week-end drinking early, for by the sound of his voice and the way he spoke his words she knew that he was already a little drunk.

“I’ve got a good story,” he said. “I won’t be in till late.”

“What is it?” asked Mrs. McLeod.

“A woman down here is having children. She’s had three and Doc Hazlett says there are more coming. I guess she can’t make the dead line.”

“What’s her name?”

“Mary Kowlski ... k for kitten, o for Osbert, w for Willie, l for lulu, s for sugar, k for kitten and i for idiot.”

“Okay.”

“Her husband works in the Chain’s factory, address 62 Franklin Street. His name is Jan ... like jam only n for Nettie at the end.”

“Yes. Call me back as soon as they know how many.”

“Okay.”

“Where can I call you back?”

There was a moment’s hesitation and then a weak voice said, “Gashouse Mary’s.”

“Okay.”

Suddenly she felt discouraged again. Willie had broken his word and gone to Gashouse Mary’s before the Saturday paper went to press.

Again she went to work picking on the typewriter. “Mrs. Jan Kowlski of 62 Franklin Street gave birth this afternoon to quadruplets. Her husband is a worker employed at the



Plattessville Chain Mill. Mrs. Kowlski, it seems, will be the winner of the generous prize offered by W. M. Dougherty for the largest number of children born to one family during the year.”

As she typed the last word, Alf Lyman, the linotype operator, thrust his head in the door, his hatchet face beneath his eyeshade giving him the appearance of a voracious crow.

“Any more copy, Mrs. McLeod?” he asked.

“Just this,” she said, handing him the barbecue story and the story of the freight wreck, “and here’s a woman who had quadruplets ... anyway she’s had three and there’s more on the way, so I’ve said quadruplets.”

“Foreigner?” asked Alf.

“Yes, Pole.”

“Better set that last. She might have a litter.”

“Okay. Put it in a box.”

The sudden excitement put her in a better humor and when ten minutes had passed, she rang Gashouse Mary’s bar and asked for Willie.

“Paper’s going to press,” she said. “Any more?”

“Five,” said Willie, “and Doc says that’s all. They’re celebratin’.”

Quickly she ran through the room. “Five there are,” she called through the door to Alf above the rattling of the machinery. “Quintuplets!”

“Was I right?” Alf shouted back.

Then as she closed the door again she remembered the line about W. M. Dougherty’s prize. She had meant to attack him, and tonight the *Daily Shield and Banner* would seem no more

than a Dougherty organ bent on giving Old Dougherty publicity.

## 11

While Mrs. McLeod worked behind the closed door of her cubbyhole Jane went on with the writing of her society column and the editing of the county correspondence. The wedding didn't happen until four o'clock but she had been to see Mrs. Vanderpool, the bride's mother, and got all the information necessary—the decorations, the list of guests, the description of the wedding presents, the menu. The rest she wrote out of her own imagination, using the flowery phrases which Aunt Vinnie said the people liked. She hated every word of the story and was ashamed of herself for writing it. Mrs. Vanderpool had been silly and tiresome, saying over and over again, "Please be accurate. You newspaper people make so many mistakes." Anyway, thank Heaven, she didn't have to go to the wedding itself and see Hazel Vanderpool simpering in her wedding gown, beside pimply Herman Starburger under an arbor of smilax and lilies. At four o'clock she would be free to join Jimmy and drive down to Millersville for supper at the roadhouse.

The wedding out of the way, she tackled the county correspondence. When she first came to work on the *Daily Shield and Banner* she had ripped it apart unmercifully, changing the wording and the phrases to make it sound up-to-date, condensing and killing the floweriness which was a passion with the old maids and widows who sent it in each week from the villages which dotted the county. Mrs. McLeod, preoccupied with many troubles, had let it go through without looking at it, and became aware of the

sacrilege committed by her niece only when the *Daily Shield and Banner* received a flood of protest from the correspondents and their friends. After that she said to Jane, “It doesn’t matter how it sounds. They’re the ones who read the county correspondence. They’ve always written it like that and they like it that way.”

“Why, it isn’t even grammatical,” Jane had protested.

“What does grammar matter? You can’t hurt their feelings. They love to see in print what they’ve written just as much as you do.”

“It does matter. It’s one of the most important things in the world.”

But Aunt Vinnie had only smiled and said, “Be a good girl and let it go through. Just watch the spelling, that’s all.”

When Aunt Vinnie was like that Jane hated her, mostly because when Aunt Vinnie was gentle and smiling and firm, it always made her feel terribly young and stupid. It was worse, almost, than if Aunt Vinnie scolded her the way Aida did. So after that she let the county correspondence go through exactly as it was sent except for correcting the spelling.

It wasn’t funny any more to her when she read:

“Mrs. Curtis was over to the Henry Billings place Sunday. Brought back two hams and some fresh eggs, gifts of the generous Henry.”

Or:

“Mrs. Bert Pease has a bonny new boy. Congratulations Bert!”

Or:

“Miss Elvira Sefton is expected at any moment to announce her fiancailles to Homer Banks from over Geneva way.”

At first when she came home from college in the East, the county correspondence always caused a warm feeling of superiority, but lately that too had gone, leaving only boredom in its place. These were her own people. She had grown up with them. She knew them all, the second and third generation of the pioneers who had built a great rich state out of the wilderness. If her mother at home on the ranch near Pottstown had written the county correspondence, it would have sounded exactly like the copy she spent half a day each week reading and correcting. So at rare moments she felt ashamed of herself for being what Gashouse Mary and Aida called “uppity.”

She might not have been “uppity” if she had not also been unhappy. She was unhappy for a great many reasons, because the ranch at Pottstown had been yielding less and less ever since the war, because she didn’t really belong in Plattesville and could not find any way to make herself fit into that somewhat special picture, and most of all because she felt that she wasn’t getting anywhere. Sometimes she lay awake in her big room in McLeod’s Folly and thought, “I’m twenty-three years old and I haven’t got anywhere. Just working on a broken-down, old-fashioned newspaper where I don’t even get a regular salary. No nice clothes, nothing. Not even married yet. I’ll be an old maid grumbling away in the office like Myrtle Ferguson downstairs.”

She didn’t want to be married and settle down with a husband in a little house in Plattesville. She wanted a big house and a couple of cars, and enough money to help out her

parents and the Pottstown ranch which she loved better than any place in the world. She wanted to have a lot of money and to be somebody. She had, she decided, been poor long enough. Now, looking back, she hated those years in the East when she had worked in the college tearoom to help pay her tuition and board.

It was ambition which made her unhappy. It was herself who had chosen to go East to college instead of going like other girls in the county to the State University. She had wanted to get out into the world, but somehow she hadn't really escaped at all. She had only gone away for a little while, and here she was back again, worse off than if she had never seen the East at all.

But she was unhappiest of all over Jimmy Dougherty. He made her unhappy because she was falling in love with him and she really didn't want to. It was, she knew, a betrayal of Aunt Vinnie and her own parents and all they stood for, and a betrayal of herself as well. There were even times when she was out with him in a restaurant when she felt ashamed to be seen with him before people she met there. She deceived Aunt Vinnie and Aida because she was ashamed. Yet she couldn't help going out with him. Lately she had even taken to sitting in the office staring at the wall for a long period of time, trying in spite of herself to see the black hair and blue eyes and good-looking face and the engaging, unmoral, mocking grin. And always there was a terrible small voice saying, "If you married Jimmy Dougherty you could have a wonderful house and two automobiles and trips to New Orleans and St. Louis and even New York. You'd be somebody then. After a while you'd be able to fix it so that people wouldn't even mind his being Old Dougherty's son."

But he hadn't even asked her to marry him yet, and she was afraid that when he did ask her, she would say "Yes" just because of the black hair and blue eyes and grin and because with all the money he had she could do all the things she liked. Both reasons made her ashamed and unhappy. Scottish Presbyterian blood stirred in her veins and made her feel that neither reason was good enough. All the same she lay awake at night thinking, "I'm twenty-three already and I haven't got anywhere."

At four o'clock she put her desk in order, closed the drawers, and went to the dim little mirror advertising Reiselman's Cigars, where she rearranged her hair and put on her hat. She did it with a nervous self-consciousness, fearful that before she got away the door would open and Willie Ferguson would come in. She wanted desperately to get out of the office without seeing Aunt Vinnie and without some acid remark from Willie, so she hurried as much as possible, but as she turned from the mirror she discovered Willie standing unsteadily in the doorway. He was regarding her with a tipsy air of mockery, and as she turned he said in his richest Bourbon voice, "Goin' sparkin'?"

She tossed her head and didn't answer him and the Bourbon voice said, "Better look out for that Dougherty squirt, he ain't up to no good."

She felt her face go red with unbearable rage. She heard herself saying, "I can take care of myself. You mind your own business, you drunken old sot."

But all the response she got was a cracked laugh and the sound of the Bourbon voice saying, "When I was your age I was kind of uppity too, but I had to come down off my high-

horse. Wait'll you get married and have a dozen kids. Wait'll you get to be my age. You'll change your tune."

She started to answer him but the door of the cubbyhole opened and Aunt Vinnie came out, her hair in wilder disorder than ever, her face and hands smudged from the struggle of trying to put a new-fangled ribbon into an old-fashioned typewriter. The sight of her, just as she meant to escape, was not quite the last straw; the last came when Aunt Vinnie said, "Will you be home for supper?"

In spite of herself she answered wildly, "You know I won't. You heard me tell Aida."

Aunt Vinnie didn't lose her temper. She just said quietly, "I guess I must have forgot."

Then as she opened the door, she heard the Bourbon voice behind her saying, "Young woman, you got no right to speak to your Aunt Vinnie like that." And all she could do was to slam the door, which only made her feel worse than ever. By the time she reached the bottom of the worn stairway tears were streaming down her freshly made-up face—tears of rage and shame and heartbreak.

In the office behind her Mrs. McLeod was saying to Willie Ferguson, "You leave her alone, Willie. She's a good girl."

"Mighty pert!"

"Well, I can remember, Willie, when you were mighty pert yourself. I can remember when you were the struttinest lady-killer in the whole Southwest."

But that only pleased Willie. The lined old face broke into a grin. He gave a hoarse chuckle meant to be rakish and wicked and took the Bourbon bottle out of the bottom drawer.

“How about a little drink, Mis’ McLeod? It’s Saturday night.”

Surprisingly she answered, “Don’t mind if I do.”

The old-fashioned press was rolling away belowstairs. The day’s work was done and she felt oddly tired and defeated and old.

Willie fetched two paper cups from the water cooler, poured a drink into each and raised his cup. A queer distant look came into the small, shrewd blue eyes. “To J. E.,” he said. When he had swallowed his drink he added, “Somehow Bourbon don’t taste right out of paper cups.”

## 12

Because of the tears Jane had to stop in at the Boston Store and go into the ladies’ room to make up her face all over again. And that made her late and failed to improve her humor. But Jimmy Dougherty was waiting for her already in his new olive-green roadster in front of the Dougherty Block. Both the sight of the roadster, all shiny and new, and the sight of Jimmy himself, jumping out and grinning at her when she came up, made her feel happier. Which had the stronger effect she was unable to judge.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said, “but everything has gone wrong today.”

“You’re worth waiting for, any time.”

“I hate pretty speeches.”

They both climbed in and he started the motor. “You’re the most defeating girl I ever knew.”

“Why?”

“Always saying things like that. Always snapping me up.”



“I’m sorry, only that kind of stuff always sounds like something out of the movies.”

She didn’t really hate the speech itself. She loved it; only she had the feeling that he had talked like that to a hundred other girls. Her instinct told her that Jimmy was that kind of man; worse than that, he was attractive because he *was* that kind of man. It made her feel cheap that she liked the speech, and liked him for saying it. Worst of all there was something inside her, some sort of unhappiness which made her say things like that even to people she liked most.

After a moment she said, “Anyway, I’m cross today.”

“Why?”

“Everything has gone wrong since I got up this morning.”

“What, for instance?”

“Nothing. Never mind.”

She could not and would not tell him the story beginning in the morning with Aida’s scolding. She would not tell him even one incident of the day because to tell him any of it would be a betrayal of her Aunt Vinnie. That was one of the things which upset her friendship with Jimmy—that she couldn’t be frank or confide in him without betraying Aunt Vinnie and all the McLeods as well to the Doughertys. And she told herself, “I would rather cut off my right arm than do that.”

“Anything I can do to help?”

“No.”

He grinned, using that weapon which always disarmed her. “You’ll be all right when we get to Millersville and have a cocktail.”

“Maybe.”

“Anyway, it’s a swell day.”

What he said was true. The day could not be finer and he had a kind of animal appreciation of its fineness. The early summer had brought a thick cloud of green over the plains and along the brooks and ditches. It was an evening when everyone should have felt the simple glory of being alive as Jimmy felt it and here she was riding beside him, fretful and unhappy. They drove on for a time in silence across the flat plain dotted with ranch houses, ending at last in a barrier of low hills which were already turning opalescent in the sunset; and as they drove her mood changed. The tenseness of her nerves slackened a little and a kind of peace stole over her.

Presently he said, “Your aunt paid us a call this morning.”

She divined a mockery in his voice and knew that he was grinning, but she would not look at him for fear of losing her temper. She said with a certain tartness, “What aunt? Mrs. McLeod?”

“Yeah, I don’t know any of the others.”

“I’ve got aunts all over the county. The family have been here for a long time.” She had managed to hit back at him in return for the mockery, but almost at once she felt ashamed of herself.

“We’re always glad to see her.”

“Yes, I suppose you have a good laugh as soon as she’s gone.”

This time he didn’t answer her, but presently, after they had driven for a long time in silence, he said, “You’re one of the most disagreeable young women I’ve ever met. I don’t know why I should bother about you except you’re so pretty.”

“Thanks.”

“And because you aren’t really like that.”

“I know what I’m really like,” and she wanted to say, “I’m selfish and nasty and quarrelsome,” only she wouldn’t give him such an advantage.

“The right man could do a lot with you.”

This she found too insulting to bear. The tears came into her eyes, blinding her, and filling her with a new fury. She said, “If you don’t stop talking about me, I’ll jump out and walk home.”

He did not answer her and to her astonishment he drove the car to the side of the road and stopped the motor. Then he said, “Now look here. We’ve got to settle this. There’s no use in going on to Millersville if we’re going to quarrel all evening.”

“I’m not quarreling.”

“Well, I don’t know what it is, but anyway neither of us is enjoying himself very much.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll behave myself, but it’s your fault too.”

“Maybe.”

He took her hand. It was a big handsome comforting hand. He said, “I’ll behave myself if you will.”

Reluctantly she said, “All right. If you don’t speak again until we get to Millersville.”

“Okay.”

He started the motor and they drove off in silence, and as they drove she thought again as she had thought so many times, lying awake in the middle of the night, that she was a fool to go on seeing him when she knew that everything was against any good coming out of it. She told herself that this

was the last time she would see him. After tonight she would be finished with him and then maybe she would have peace and her disposition would be better. And everybody would be pleased—Aunt Vinnie and Aida and even that horror, Willie Ferguson.

They were silent for nearly half an hour until they came into the foothills and then without thinking or willing it, she said, “I love this country, I’ll never leave it.”

“Not even to go back East?”

“No. There’s no room in the East. Out here you can breathe.”

“It *is* pretty big.”

Big! Was that all he saw in it? She wanted to laugh with scorn but controlled herself. What could he, a newcomer, know of this country where every stick and stone was somehow associated with the great tribe of McLeod?

As they climbed out of the flat plains into the hills toward Millersville, she forgot the quarrel and the ill temper passed away. There was something about the hills that always lifted the spirits of the people who lived day after day, year in and year out, on the vast plain. The old cattlemen and their families had always looked on the hills as a place of spiritual refuge, going there on every holiday to picnic and fish in the little lakes that lay hidden away in the more remote valleys. The hills worked a kind of magic on them, and the same magic was working now in the soul and spirit of Jane. Here there were trees and wild shrubs and wild flowers and all sorts of wild small animals. The first touch of summer had brushed the hills and they were glorious in the sunset.

They climbed again for a long time in silence and then suddenly the car came over the crest of a hill and below them

lay Millersville with its groves and trees, its little hotel and tourist camp built just on the edge of the little lake that was a deep sapphire color in the blue sunset shadows which filled the little valley. It was a spot which Jane knew well, which she had known since she was a small child. Millersville and the little lake belonged too in the tradition of the McLeod clan, for the Miller who had discovered the lake and built the hotel was a brother of Jane's grandmother. Millers still lived there and Ira Miller, the grandson of the founder, still ran the hotel and the tourist camp which had brought new prosperity to the place. She knew the deep blue lake and every tree of the groves which grew down to the edge of the water, and now the sight of the place as they descended the winding road leading down to it swept away her restlessness in a flood of happy memories. Suddenly she no longer hated Jim or Aunt Vinnie or herself or even poor drunken old Willie Ferguson. In the sunset she felt a sudden blossoming of the spirit, a kindliness that approached love for everyone she knew. All at once, because she was very young, she was happy.

## 13

Before the slow valley twilight slipped into darkness, they went for a row on the little lake in one of Cousin Ira's boats, talking scarcely at all, drifting now and then along the edge among the water lilies, watching the startled birds which flew up with wild cries as the boat slipped among the reeds. And presently she found herself watching Jimmy Dougherty as she had never watched him before, stealthily, speculating about him—what he was really like when he was not wise-cracking and trying to impress women, what it was exactly

that he wanted of her, what there was in him exactly which made her want to see him in spite of everything, why the thought had ever occurred to her that in a weak moment she *might* really marry him. She knew his shortcomings—that he was too gay, that he made love as easily as any tomcat, that he was not too well educated. It always troubled her that he would not talk about plays or books or economics or even of politics outside the small world of Plattsville, where he knew politics only too well. He could talk of nothing except that which touched him at the moment—what had happened during the day. He lived, it seemed to her, from moment to moment, unaware of fine and subtle things, of all the things she had learned in the East to admire. Always she told herself that she could never marry and live with a man who had neither background nor cultivation, for it was a part of her dream of being important that she would have in Plattsville a kind of *salon*. She would wake up the people of Plattsville. She would bring lecturers and symphony orchestras and singers and exhibitions of pictures. She would ...

And then she forgot all this in a sudden flash of insight about him. It was born of a sudden glimpse of him as he sat opposite her, turning his head a little to correct the direction of the boat. He had taken off his coat and rolled the sleeves of his shirt above the elbows and he was rowing with the easy strength of a man who knows his own body, a man in whom body and spirit are perfectly coordinated with no complications, no fears, no nonsense. In that flash of insight she thought, “He belongs here on this lake, among the trees, as any wild animal belongs here. He belongs much more than I do.” That was why he fascinated her. That was why he was irresistible—because he was such a healthy animal. It was very clear to her suddenly and she was ashamed at the quick

intimation of what love really was, ashamed because she had believed herself above such emotions. And she was frightened too. Something about him as he sat there opposite her, driving the heavy boat through the water, made her want to cry.

Then the sudden instant of revelation passed and in the next second she could not remember what it was that had been revealed to her. She heard him saying, "We'd better go back and have a cocktail." And quickly because the shadow of her sudden fear still clung to her she said, "Yes, it's getting dark."

Changing the course of the boat, he rowed in silence for a long time, grinning at her once or twice as if to tell her that it was a beautiful evening and that he was happy with her sitting there opposite him. Then as they drew near the little pier, he said, "There's something I've got to ask you later."

In spite of herself, her heart leaped. She did not want him to ask her to marry him because she would have to refuse him. Yet the idea was agreeable and titillating. She wanted to go on seeing him, but if he asked her to marry him she would have either to say "yes" or "no." She could not say "yes." There were too many things against it. And if she said "no" she would have to give up seeing him and that she did not want to do. She felt herself blushing, and feeling thankful for the twilight, she answered, "All right."

By the time they reached the little pier, the open space in front of the hotel was filled with cars of every sort. Half the younger world of Plattsville was there for the Saturday night dance.

It was a world which she did not know very well because before she went to college in the East she had lived mostly at

the ranch, seeing only those people who belonged to the old cattlemen's world, and when she came home again and went into Platteville to work for Aunt Vinnie, she had made little progress because she felt strange and unadaptable and almost alien. The world of these motors was the world, not of the county, but of the town, a world made up of the children of bankers and lawyers and merchants, and in it she never felt at home. It was the world too of the country club and for that world neither she nor her own family nor Aunt Vinnie had ever had enough money.

So when she entered the big dining room she felt shy and embarrassed, shy because of Platteville's younger set, and embarrassed of being seen out with Old Dougherty's son. And at the same time she felt defiant, and ashamed because she was ashamed.

She knew some of the people, not well, but enough to show her recognition with an abrupt nod of the head which conveyed defiance, resentment and even contempt. Jimmy knew a good many of them and those he knew he spoke to, always showing that wide grin which had so evil an effect upon Jane's feelings—that grin which made him seem so attractive, but with which he was too generous, giving it to everyone—the grin of a young man who had come to terms with life and so could afford to be pleasant to the whole world.

They had cocktails and then danced, and presently Cousin Ira Miller came to show them their table. He was a big man, nearly sixty, with big hands and feet, a rough-hewn, rather grizzled head and sharp blue eyes. He had inherited Millersville and a little hotel, rotting and in need of paint, and he had kept both, barely making ends meet for nearly twenty



years, hunting, fishing, farming a little, begetting eight children and living a kind of idyllic life very near to the trees and the birds and the animals. And then when he was middle-aged the automobile brought prosperity to Millersville and the old-fashioned lakeside hotel. It brought people during the long summer evenings from Plattesville and towns much farther off; it brought people to fish and people to spend the week end; and it brought people to stay in the tourist camp which had grown and grown until it filled all the little grove behind the hotel. Ira's father had been the first white man to see the little lake and now, sixty-five years later, Ira was profiting by the foresight which had led his father to lay claim to the whole country round it.

Ira kissed Jane and asked after the family and Aunt Vinnie and said, "You mustn't go without going into the kitchen to say hello to Ella. She's awful busy on Saturday nights seein' that everything goes right."

When he had gone, Jimmy said, "I always like to see Ira. There's something about him that's like a good western film."

They had a good dinner with trout out of the ice-cold water of the hatchery which Ira had built at the back of the grove, and the best cut of sirloin which the plains below could offer. They drank St. Louis beer and danced some more and then Jim said, "Let's go and have a row by moonlight," and she thought, with pessimism rising in her heart, "Now he's going to propose and I can't stop him. Oh, why can't we just go on as we are?"

On the lake they rowed for a long time without speaking at all, silenced by the beauty of the night, but Jane kept thinking, "What will I say if he asks me now? What will I say?" She didn't want to marry him. She could not. But ...

Then she heard him saying, "I told you there was something I wanted to ask you." And faintly she answered, "Yes?"

"How would you like a good job on the *News*?"

The question startled her and she thought, "What a funny way to begin." But she said, "What do you mean?"

"I mean I can get you a good job with good money. I've been thinking about it for a long time. You're never going to get anywhere on the *Daily Shield and Banner*. I hate to see you wasting your time on a broken-down, old-fashioned paper like that."

Her pride flared up. She was suddenly wild with anger. She wanted to cry and she wanted to strike him all at the same time.

"It's a good enough paper," she said, with a wild effort to control herself. "I wouldn't think of leaving Aunt Vinnie," and at the same time she realized that this was really all he had to say, that he had never thought of asking her to marry him, and in the merciful moonlit darkness she felt her face growing hot with shame and rage. It was as if he had insulted her.

"I didn't know," he said humbly. "I thought you might like it."

"Anyway, I wouldn't touch a dirty, filthy sheet like the *News* with tongs."

He didn't answer her but she knew that he understood what she meant—that she would have nothing to do with a newspaper that belonged to the Dougherty gang. That was too much—that the Dougherty gang, even Jimmy himself, dared to offer her, a McLeod, favors. It was the first time

there had ever been between them an open hint of the truth that she was a McLeod and he was Old Dougherty's son, that she came of the people who had made the county and he was no more than the son of a shrewd and crooked politician who was a newcomer.

Now he didn't answer at all but merely turned the boat in the direction of the little pier. When they landed he said in an odd voice, "I think maybe we'd better go home."

"Whatever you like."

But she knew by the queer sound of his voice that she had hurt him.

Together they found their way to the motor. Together, side by side, they drove back to Plattesville. But they never spoke during the long drive and when at last they drove up before McLeod's Folly, he got out, opened the door and helped her out of the car. Without a word he opened the rickety gate and she said, "You mustn't come all the way up." But he answered, "I'm not going to have you go alone up that path through the bushes." And she wanted suddenly to cry and say, "I've been a damned fool. Don't let's quarrel! We mustn't! We mustn't!" But she said nothing and passed through the gate with a stiff dignity which she knew in her heart was ridiculous. But she could do nothing about it.

When they reached the door and had put the key into the lock he said, "Your aunt oughtn't to keep those bums in the cellar. Some day one of them will try to murder her."

She could think of nothing to say but a melodramatic, "What do you mean?"

He only took off his hat and said "Good night," so there was nothing left for her to do but to open the door and go into the house.

Alone in the gaslit hallway of McLeod's Folly she realized that he hadn't said, as he always did, "What are you doing Thursday?" or "When am I going to see you again?" He had simply said, "Good night," and gone away. Then she thought, "How did he know about the tramps? He's known all the time. Now he'll make trouble for Aunt Vinnie." But in her heart she knew that he wouldn't.

Upstairs in her own room, after she had undressed and climbed into the huge walnut bed, she could not sleep for pondering what it was she wanted in life. It had been an awful day and everything had gone wrong from the beginning. What Jimmy had said about the tramps in the cellar began to trouble her so that she could not rest until she had got out of bed and locked her door, a thing she had never done since she had come to live at McLeod's Folly. Then suddenly she had visions of strange men springing at her out of the tangled lilacs and syringas, of unshaven desperadoes haunting the huge shadowy halls of the old house.

## 14

At home Mrs. McLeod had eaten listlessly one of Aida's best dinners, suffering because of her indifference and lack of appetite the unceasing reproaches of her cook, so that it was a relief to her when at last the meal was finished and Aida could no longer scold her. Before she said "Good night," she told Aida about the young man she had seen at the police station.

"Too bad you all didn't see him before the police," said Aida. "I hate to see a nice young man get caught up by that Old Dougherty gang."

When Aida had gone to bed Mrs. McLeod put out all the lights except the one in the hall and went upstairs to have a bath and wash her thin, gray hair. It seemed to her that she had never been so tired before, and for an hour she lay in the hot water, fretting about what was to come if now, when everything was going so badly with the *Daily Shield and Banner*, she was to lose her strength when she needed it most.

After she had gone to bed she lay awake until she heard the sound of a motor at the gate and then the sound of the front door closing. Then quietly she rose and went into the hall, meaning to say "Good night" to Jane. There was friendliness in her intention, for she knew that Jane was unhappy, but there was no curiosity, for she knew well enough with whom Jane had spent the evening. As she made her way along the big, dark hallway, she was again filled with a desire to help the girl, but how she was to do it she did not know. Then as she neared the door of Jane's room, she heard the sound of sobbing and stopped, a little frightened and uncertain. Now, because she had never had any children of her own, she did not know how to behave. For a moment she even felt that Jane was wiser and had more experience than herself. Jane, after all, had been to school in the East and she belonged to another generation which knew what it wanted and how to get it in a fashion she had never known. For a long time she stood there and at last, overcome by the sense of her own foolishness and inadequacy, she went back again to her own room.

But there was no sleep. In the darkness she lay awake, oppressed by her own weariness and all the worries which tormented her. She thought about the Dougherty gang, and

Jane, and the bills for newsprint paper which were long overdue, and the mortgages on McLeod's Folly and the *Daily Shield and Banner*, and about the nice young man brought in by the police who was spending Sunday in jail, and about what Gashouse Mary had told her; and thinking about Gashouse Mary made her remember the town as it had been long ago when they were both little girls. And she thought, "I must be growing old," because she found more pleasure in contemplating the remote past than in thinking of the present or planning the future.

Presently the past became so dominant that she rose and put on a worn and woolly old dressing gown of gray flannel and, taking a key out of the lacquer box which Cousin Helen, who was a missionary in China, had given her long ago, she went into the hall once more and down the stairs, striking matches as she went to light her way. At the bottom of the stairs she reached J. E.'s den, and unlocking the door went in and lighted the old-fashioned gas chandelier. When she had seated herself in the familiar leather chair, she remained for a time gazing at the heavy mahogany desk, at J. E.'s pen and his meerschaum pipe and the little tray of pencils which remained exactly as he had left them, thirty years before. And memories of her old happiness swept her away and made her young again and humble and thankful. For she knew that she had had what few women had ever known, a kind of perfect happiness and a love that was complete and satisfactory and eternal—the sort of love she wanted Jane so desperately to have, the sort of love which Jane, so young and headstrong, could not value or understand, the sort of love that Jane would call sentimental and impossible.

The surge of old memories drove away her weariness, and presently she took out a sheaf of copy paper and pencils from a drawer in the desk (not J. E.'s sacred pencils but her own) and set to work on The Book.

She wrote now, rapidly and furiously, with a power and a facility she had never known before, the closing pages of this book into which shyly she had poured out all the wealth of memory and tradition and experience which was hers, all the fire and passion which in thirty years of widowhood had had no outlet, never thinking in her humbleness that the small life which she had known in Plattesville and the county was in its essence no different from the life of the great world outside. She wrote because she had to write, because there was something inside her which had to be told. There was a richness there which was long since ripe.

She had begun The Book long ago, ashamed of her own pretensions—that she, Lavinia McLeod, should have the presumption to think herself a writer. She had meant simply to write down what she knew and what she remembered of the old life, and somehow it had become a novel and J. E. had become the hero, and it had gone on and on until it was immensely long, hundreds of pages stored away in the old cowhide trunk in the vast dusty attic of McLeod's Folly. Nobody would ever see it, not even Jane, until after she was dead. The Book was, in a way, her child, the child of her childlessness upon which she lavished all the love that since the death of J. E. had had no object save Aida and Jane, and the defeated tramps whom she sheltered in her cellar, and the poor of Plattesville, and strange people out of the old life like Gashouse Mary and poor drunken Willie Ferguson.

She wrote on and on until at last the darkness outside the window turned to gray. Then suddenly she was tired with a weariness she had never known before; it was as if her very soul was empty. Wearily she put away the pages of manuscript in the drawer along with the worn pencils and rose and turned off the gas. She was cold now, and as she climbed the stairs she thought how miserable and bleak was the sensation of coldness, and of how cold all the poor tramps must be who had no place to sleep. And that made her think again of that poor boy who had been brought in by the police, and suddenly an idea occurred to her, an idea so logical and so obvious that she was astonished it had not occurred to her before. There was a way of rescuing him, a way to save him from sleeping every night in jail, from working at cleaning the streets and building roads and hauling rubbish. He was a newspaperman. She would offer him a job and then he would no longer be a vagrant. It wasn't too late because by good luck there wouldn't be any court until Monday. He hadn't yet come up before the magistrate. Harvey Bingham, the police chief, was an old friend; he would help her to manage it. She couldn't offer the boy much in the way of salary but he might not mind that. He might be willing to share what there was over out of the dubious weekly earnings of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. He was young. He looked strong and energetic. He might be just the person she was seeking, sent by God. Anyway, working on the *Daily Shield and Banner* would be better than hauling garbage for the city of Platteville and spending every night in a cold and cheerless cell.

Still shivering in her imagination she lay in the great bed she had shared long ago with J. E. until it was daylight, when at last she fell asleep on the Sunday she had meant for rest.



But on Sunday Aida never dreamed of waking her, so she slept all the day until four in the afternoon.

## 15

On Sunday evening Jane had supper with Mrs. McLeod and afterward she went straight to bed. The conversation was not sprightly and they did not mention the Doughertys. Nor did Mrs. McLeod give any hint of her plan about the young man who was languishing in the Plattesville jail. She kept silent because she knew that Jane would say that the plan was foolish and idiotic, that she did not know anything about the young man, and that he might be a thief or a murderer. Indeed, Mrs. McLeod was not so much afraid of Jane's arguments as of herself; if she talked the plan over with Jane she knew she would never carry it through, because, as her own common sense told her, it *was* both reckless and stupid. But she had been reckless and stupid all her life and she had always enjoyed living enormously, even after J. E. had died and she thought there was nothing to live for. Even if the young man did turn out to be a bad egg, it would not make much difference to anyone, and it would be exciting to see what happened. You got about what you gave in this life, and out of all her foolish generosity in the past she had, she knew, already reaped a great harvest, certainly not in money, but in good will and kindness and respect.

So on Monday morning, she had breakfast half an hour early so that she might reach the jail before the magistrate's court had opened and have a talk with the young man. If she were late, he might already have appeared and been sentenced to two months as a vagrant.

The change in the breakfast hour made Aida suspicious, and each time she came into the dining room with eggs or hot bread and coffee, she sent out feelers—stray remarks and hints that were calculated to make Mrs. McLeod give herself away.

With Aida curiosity was a devastating vice. She had to know everything or she sulked or had the “miseries.” Before breakfast was finished Mrs. McLeod detected the familiar signs of a fresh attack of the “miseries” in the baffled Aida. She shuffled her feet and slammed the door as she went out. She regarded her mistress with sullen, almost sinister, sidelong glances. At the very end of breakfast she moaned slightly as if stricken with some secret and fatal pain.

At this point Mrs. McLeod knew it was her cue to ask the reason for the moans and when she asked, Aida, with the air of an early Christian martyr, said, “It ain’t nothin’, Mis’ McLeod, but the same old misery. It’s gonna carry me off one of these days.”

Brightly Mrs. McLeod said, “Nonsense, Aida. Nothing’s going to carry you off. Where is the pain—in your stomach, your jaw, or where?”

“It ain’t in no special place, Mis’ McLeod. It’s all over me.”

“I’ll tell Dr. Craig to come and see you.”

And with a huge sigh Aida answered, “It ain’t doctors that’ll do me any good, Mis’ McLeod. It’s a misery of the speerit.”

For once Mrs. McLeod remained adamant before the spectacle of a stricken Aida.

She left her dragging one foot after the other with the mien of a doomed woman, knowing that if she returned with the young man the “misery” would be cured instantly.

With foreboding in her spirit, she set off down the path between the syringa bushes. Monday was always a bad day at the office. There was never any news, and Willie Ferguson if he turned up at all would be suffering from a headache and dyspepsia, and downstairs in the business office his wife Myrtle, with her prim high white collar, would be sour and disagreeable because Willie had been drunk at Gashouse Mary’s and hadn’t come home at all on Saturday night. And now, Jane had the sulks because of her bad conscience and because something had gone wrong between her and Jimmy Dougherty. No, Monday was always an awful day when it seemed to her that she had to carry the whole of the office and half creation on her own thin shoulders.

## 16

She had no trouble with the chief of police. She had to wait for him to arrive, and when he came in she went right to the heart of the subject.

No, he said, if she wanted to give the young fella a job, he wouldn’t make any objection and he guessed the magistrate wouldn’t make any. The young fella, he said, seemed a harmless nincompoop who spent all his time reading the books that were stuffed in his pockets. Anyway, the chief said, he didn’t seem to be the regular sort of bum that came through Plattesville. He probably wouldn’t be any good at repairing streets and emptying ash cans. If he had a job, of course, he wasn’t a vagrant so the law couldn’t do anything about it, technically.

“Anyway,” he said generously, “I’m always ready to do you a favor, Vinnie. You’ve always been square with me.”

When he said that she felt suddenly traitorous and ashamed, but she held her peace and said doubtfully, “Maybe I’d better talk to him first before we do anything.”

“Sure, that would be a good idea. One of the boys will take you over to the jail.”

She shook hands and thanked him, not minding any more the fact that this was Monday, because something exciting was going to happen.

## 17

The prisoner was shaving when she arrived and asked for a moment to wipe the soap from his face before she came in. He looked much neater and much nicer than he had when she ran across him near the Memorial Fountain, and at sight of him behind the bars she had an impression that by nature he was a precise and rather neat young man, and the rumpled and spotted suit and old hat were like a costume one might put on to play charades. The warden unlocked the door of his cell and ordered him into the corridor where he left him with Mrs. McLeod.

She said, “Good morning,” and he answered, “Good morning,” and then nothing happened until she said, as if she were a hostess, “Won’t you sit down?”

“Thank you.”

He looked at her coldly out of gray-blue eyes which until now she had not noticed especially. They were honest, matter of fact, and like his voice, a little cold.

She said, “I’m Mrs. McLeod ... Mrs. J. E. McLeod.”

“Yes,” he said without interest. “What can I do for you, Mrs. McLeod?” And then she realized that being Mrs. J. E. McLeod might mean something in Platteville but that it could mean nothing in the world outside.

“I’m the proprietor of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, the oldest newspaper in Platteville. I’m a newspaperwoman myself.”

“Yes.” The tone was still reserved, with a little shadow of mockery in it.

“I’ve come to get you out of jail.”

“Thank you.”

Then again, sharply, it struck her that there was something strange about him. It seemed to her that he did not mind, in spite of his well-cut clothes and superior appearance, having been arrested and locked up in a common cell. He was behaving with a curious dignity, almost as if there were some honor in his situation. It made her feel suddenly silly and ridiculous, so that she said abruptly, “But don’t you want to get out of jail?”

She felt her face growing red, and she thought, “Maybe he’s a forger or something and wants to hide away in the Platteville jail.”

Then nervously she told of seeing him brought in and how she divined at once that he was a superior sort of person, and that it was a pity he should be locked up and put to work digging ditches and emptying ash cans. He did not seem perturbed by the horrors she described, so, still more and more nervous and ill at ease, she enlarged upon them—telling about the excessively long hours, the poor food (and with a glance over her shoulder in the direction of the warden), of the cruel treatment prisoners suffered. She became so earnest

that she exaggerated and ended by drawing a picture which resembled more a medieval prison with a rack and wheel than the county jail of Plattesville.

When she stopped for breath, he said, "I don't mind all that."

She said, "I'd give you a job on my newspaper and then you wouldn't any longer be a vagrant. It's all fixed. You'd like a job, wouldn't you?"

"Not especially ... right now."

"Do you want to stay in jail?"

"Yes."

Wildly she thought, "Am I crazy or is he?" Aloud she asked, "Why?"

"I can't tell you the reason."

So, she thought, he must be a forger or a murderer or something. Only he couldn't be with a face like that.

She felt that she was being made a fool of, and knew that she should have risen with dignity and left the stubborn young man to his fate, but it was Monday morning and she had set her heart on the plan, and besides there was in her something young, even childlike, which would not let her give up without a struggle. And she was a little angry because she was aware, from the manner of the prisoner, that he thought her a meddlesome, sentimental woman.

So, with another glance over her shoulder in the direction of the warden who still remained at a distance outside the grating of the corridor, she said, "You see, I make this sort of thing my business." And she told him about the "Underground Railroad Station" for unfortunate men out of jobs which she and Aida had arranged in the cellar of

McLeod's Folly. She touched upon the corruption Old Dougherty had brought to the town, about the graft and the inhumanity of the whole system. And as she talked a strange and youthful light came into her tired and wrinkled face.

She saw that the face of the prisoner softened a little and that a light of interest came into his eyes. Presently his whole expression changed and was no longer either hostile or mocking but quite friendly.

She finished by saying that for a long time she had hoped to start a reform movement, a clean-up campaign that would make Plattesville the fine place it had once been.

When she had no more breath, she paused, and the young man smiled at her. He said, "I owe you an apology. If I was indifferent to your help it was because I thought you were just one of those meddlesome, sentimental women who get a kick out of visiting prisoners. There's a lot of women like that."

"No, it wasn't that. I thought you might like a job and I need an up-and-coming young man."

He looked at her and grinned, "Thanks for the compliment, but I want to stay in jail."

Again she asked, "Why?"

"Because I want to know exactly what it's like. And I came here to Plattesville and got picked up on purpose because I heard this was one of the toughest spots in the whole Southwest." This time it was he who glanced toward the warden. "If they knew why I was here they'd drop me like a hot cake. You see, I'm writing a series of articles on how badly the wandering honest fellow out of work is treated. They're to be published afterward in a book, so that the whole country will know about it."

She nearly said “Oh!” and then felt a sudden shock of disappointment. She had set her mind upon rescuing an unfortunate young man and now he did not want to be rescued. He actually wanted to stay in jail, caught in the net of Old Dougherty’s system. And he had a good reason, the kind of reason she understood, the kind of reason J. E. would have respected. It was the kind of thing J. E. himself might have done. She made a desperate effort to gather her scattered wits and put forth a proper argument, for she was not yet willing to give up. And the more she talked with the young man, the more she liked him. And her woman’s intuition told her that she was herself having a success with him, that in spite of her age and her dowdiness he liked her and was even a little impressed.

So she said, “You and I could do a lot together.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean, I’ve got a newspaper with about ten thousand subscribers and if you’re out for reform it’s yours. I’ve been looking for a young fellow like you for a long time. You can do with it as you like.”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t. Not just now.”

“There’s an awful big job of clean-up to do right here.” She waited for him to speak but he said nothing, so she continued, “You could get plenty of information for your book here and in other places at the same time. You could live right here and know everything at first hand.”

He looked at her for a moment, speculatively, with a look of interest in the clear gray-blue eyes. Then he said, “Perhaps.”

At this sign of encouragement the enthusiasm of Mrs. McLeod burgeoned, and drawing a little nearer to him, she



told him more and more of Old Dougherty's iniquities, and of her own helplessness with so little money and only Jane and Willie Ferguson for a staff.

"You could kill two birds with one stone," she said. "And that is always better than one."

"Yes," he said, "if you can hit both of them squarely." He coughed and looked away from her in silence for a time. Then he said, "I'd have to think it over."

"But you haven't got time. You'll be hauled up before the magistrate in an hour, and it's a sure thing that you'll get two months."

For a second he was silent, and it seemed to her that the gray-blue eyes were looking through and beyond her. Then he said, "It's extraordinary."

"What's extraordinary?"

"That a man could get two months just because he's looking for honest work."

"Well, that's the way it is, and worse." Then eagerly she added, "You've no idea how bad it is ... how shocking."

"I could think it over for an hour," he said doubtfully.

"Yes, but I've got to know beforehand so that I can step up and say you've come to Plattesville to work for me."

Again he thought for a time. Clearly he was not a young man who jumped headlong into things. At last he said, "Well, we can do it this way. When I come into court I'll make a signal to you. If I raise my hand and scratch my head it will mean that I've accepted your offer."

"It's a great chance to do good."

"Perhaps you're right. Anyway we'll see." He rose and took her hand. "Don't you want to know anything about me?"

“You said you were a newspaperman?”

“Yes, but I might be a crook too.”

“I don’t think you are. Anyway, if you *were* a crook, there isn’t much you could steal from me.”

“Well, I’m not. Good-by and thank you for your interest. I’ll see you in court.”

“Okay.”

He called out, “Warden!” And when the warden turned he said, “Come and lock me up.”

Mrs. McLeod waited, watching, until the warden had locked the door of his cell and came to release her.

“A very strange young man,” she thought. “I suppose he is cold and stiff like that because he was born in the North.”

## 18

The courthouse clock showed 9:05 on its brazen face and that left her only about half an hour to hurry to the office and see that all was going well.

Willie and Jane were both there, Willie rather less damaged than usual on a Monday morning. As she came in she had the half-born intention of telling Jane what she had been up to, but a glance at Jane told her that this was not the moment. The girl was sitting with her back turned squarely to Willie, a sign that there had been another quarrel between them. And Mrs. McLeod saw at once that Jane had been crying. As for Willie, there was no question of breaking the news to him, especially on a Monday morning when the stuffy air of the office was impregnated with the perfume of Bourbon. It would be bad enough if and when the newcomer put in an appearance at the office.

So after a perfunctory “Good morning” she went to her cubbyhole, collected the telegraph news, opened her correspondence and brought whatever work there was to do and gave it to Jane.

She said, “I’ve got a special job to do at the courthouse. I’ll have to leave everything to you till I come back. I don’t exactly know when I’ll be in.”

By the time she returned to the courthouse the magistrate’s court had opened, but there was no sign of the young man. So she had to wait, listening to the sordid cases which always depressed her so profoundly—two waitresses from the river district charged with soliciting (guilty); a Mexican charged with beating his wife (guilty); two tramps charged with vagrancy (guilty). And then the door opened and, accompanied by a policeman, her young man, the brand she meant to snatch from the burning, came in.

In the hour since she had left him, her romantic imagination had run away with her. While she walked along the streets, even while she was in the office talking with Willie and Jane, she had been thinking of him. It was almost like making up a novel. She invented a whole long and complicated story in which he helped her to clean up Plattesville, to rejuvenate the decrepit *Daily Shield and Banner*. He changed the whole of her existence. He even fell in love with Jane and wooed her away from Jimmy Dougherty. He had become in an hour a legendary figure. Unconsciously she had put him in the place of the son whom she had never borne.

And now as he came in, accompanied by the grim reality of a policeman, her heart sank because he seemed suddenly distant again and cold and unfriendly in his Northern way.

The sight of him made her see herself in turn as a nit-witted, romantic fool who was always trying to make the world a better place than it could possibly be. Why, he wasn't yet even out of the clutches of the law; he might not even want to be freed.

With beating heart she watched him cross the room and take his place in front of old Flynn, the magistrate. She heard him answering the questions asked him about his name, his age, his occupation, the reason he had come to Plattesville. He hadn't even looked about the courtroom to see if she were there.

Crossing her fingers, she prayed to herself, "Oh, God, make him come to work on the *Daily Shield and Banner*."

Then as the magistrate asked him roughly what work he had expected to find in Plattesville, she saw him raise his hand and scratch his head. In the same second, she was on her feet, hurrying down the aisle of the court to a seat just in front of the magistrate.

The rest was easy so far as procedure was concerned, but not so easy with regard to Mrs. McLeod's emotions. She was not good at plotting and she had not been so upset since J. E. proposed to her more than forty years earlier. She blushed and she could not make her voice do what she wished. But after twenty minutes, during which all of them save the prisoner discussed the case from all sides, the magistrate finally said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. The prisoner is certainly guilty on two charges (her heart sank): First, of vagrancy and second of defrauding the P. and W. railroad. Owing to the intervention of Mrs. McLeod, a citizen of prominence and character, I will be lenient and release the

prisoner on parole of good behavior in her charge for two months.”

Suddenly she felt that she was going to faint and sat down. The magistrate said, “The prisoner is free to go at any time.”

Then she pulled herself together and said, “Judge, I’ll keep an eye on the young man,” and in her enthusiasm she added, “I’ll even have him board with me.”

It wasn’t what she had expected. She had wanted him free with no strings attached, and the parole attached a string to him by which they might pull him back at any time. If he helped her in a crusade to clean up Plattesville, they could clap him back into jail on some pretext and put him to digging ditches. Old Flynn, she saw suddenly, was shrewder than she thought. And now she was faced by the reality of having a strange young man thrust into her care. Now, when she looked at him, he wasn’t any longer just an agreeable, rather good-looking young fellow who might be her son, a kind of character in a novel. He was a perfect stranger, about whom she knew nothing whatever, for whom she had accepted every responsibility. She was aware that he was standing there opposite her, free, and that they were looking at each other in an awkward silence. She had to do something so, almost sternly, as if he were a little boy, she said, “Better come with me.”

## 19

It was a brilliant day in June, and the escape from the stuffy magistrate’s court with all its sordid stories into the clear, cool air raised her spirits. She said, “I suppose we’d better get you some clothes first.”

“Yes, that’s not a bad idea. If you can get them, I’ll pay you later. You see, I didn’t bring any money with me. I set out without a penny just like any man out of work. I wanted my information to be authentic.”

Quickly she said, “Maybe you’d like some cigarettes?”

“Yes, I would ... more than anything.”

She waited until they reached the next doorway and then she stepped into it where she couldn’t be seen by passers-by and took a five-dollar bill out of the confusion of the worn bag stuffed with copy paper, lozenges, pencils and memoranda.

“Here,” she said. “Take this. It’ll be an advance.”

“Thanks. I can pay you back in a few days.”

And she said suddenly, “We haven’t discussed salary or anything. What a fool I am!”

But he said with nonchalance, “Don’t worry about that.”

He left her at once and went across the street to the tobacco shop, and while he was gone she pretended to be interested by the display of breakfast foods in the window of Hanselman’s grocery store, but she didn’t really see anything in the window or even the reflection in the glass of her own distracted, eccentric figure. She was thinking what a fool she was to have given him a five-dollar bill instead of a twenty-five cent piece. Five dollars! She and Jane and Aida could live on that for a week! And she had tossed it away just like that, as if it were no more than a scrap of paper, to a man she knew nothing about.

And then suddenly there he was beside her, not with a package of cigarettes but with a whole carton. A young man of lavish tastes indeed!

Perturbed by the sight of the carton of cigarettes she changed her course, and instead of leading him to Blackmore, the tailor, she took him to Frendlich's Perpetual Bargains in Gentlemen's Clothes. There patiently he tried one ill-fitting suit after another until he at last had chosen a very quiet one which bagged in fewer places than any of the others he had attempted. When he emerged from the dressing booth, she felt a wave of shame at her suspicion and economy, for he had really looked much better in the stained, worn suit which had been cast aside.

To Mr. Frendlich she said, "Just put that down to your advertising account." And then, as she and the young man left the shop, she said, "And now about lunch. You'd better come home with me."

But alarmingly he said, "No, if you don't mind, I'll go to a lunchroom and then I'll have a look about town to get acquainted with it."

There was nothing to do. So she said with all the firmness she could muster, "I'll expect you for dinner. Anyone can tell you where my house is. Just ask for McLeod's Folly."

"What time?"

"About half-past seven."

He held out his hand and she took it. "Thanks," he said, "I think we're going to get on fine."

Then with his hands in his pockets and a cigarette between his lips he turned and went off down the street.

## 20

For a long time she stood looking after him. Certainly he was a strange young man. He wasn't, she saw now, in the

least like J. E. and she couldn't think why the likeness had occurred to her except that in her foolish way she was always looking for young men who reminded her of J. E. in his prime. There was something cold about him and secretive—that was the word, “secretive.” He hadn't told her anything, and now he had gone off with her five dollars and a new suit of clothes for which she had paid.

Alarm took possession of her, and for the first time she had intimations of the full depths of her folly. Very likely she would never see him again. Very likely he would disappear, and she would become the laughingstock of half the town when the story got out. She had meant to tell Jane about him when she went back to the office, but now she could not do it. She would wait to see whether he ran away or turned up again. If he disappeared she need never tell Jane, and Jane might never hear of the story at all.

She went back to the office to find, with a certain relief, that Jane had gone out somewhere leaving a message that she would return after she had had her lunch. That, too, she found odd, for as a rule Jane either had lunch in the office or went home with her to profit by Aida's cooking. After a moment in the presence of Willie she wished that he had gone out too instead of making his lunch in the office on Bourbon and a hamburger sandwich as he always did on Mondays.

“Monday,” she thought, “was the wrong day altogether.” But on the other hand, if she hadn't acted on Monday she would have lost her young man altogether. By now he would be emptying garbage cans into a large truck along with three or four other vagrants.

But the steady hang-over gaze of Willie interrupted her thoughts. She felt it there on her back as she bent over Jane's



desk. For a time she resisted it, stirring about among the exchange newspapers, but in the end she had to give in as she always did when Willie was in this condition. Sober, Willie was timid in the knowledge that he was a failure; half-tipsy he became a combination of a lion and an old Southern colonel who regarded all women as poor foolish things.

Worst of all he spoke, calling her by her Christian name, “Now, Vinnie,” he said, “what have you been up to?”

She tried to look annoyed and even indignant, but she only succeeded in blushing like a schoolgirl.

She asked, “What do you mean?”

He chuckled. “You can’t fool me. Don’t tell me you’ve been out all morning just walking around the Square.” He cocked his head and asked, “Been down to Gashouse Mary’s again?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Well, you’ve been up to something, Vinnie, and don’t think I won’t find out.”

Then she not only blushed, she became angry. “You won’t find out,” she said. “Anyway, it’s none of your business, Willie.”

She turned and, going into her cubbyhole of an office, she slammed the door, now more angry at herself than at Willie, because she had done just what he wanted her to do—delivered herself into his hands. Although the door was shut between her and Willie, she knew perfectly well that he was sitting there, still grinning half-tipsily at the door which separated them, grinning with a grin which said, “All women are poor, helpless creatures, and now Vinnie has got herself into another mess.”

Sitting in front of J. E.'s littered old roll-top desk, she felt as flustered as the young girls courted and tormented and seduced by Willie long ago had done. She couldn't think why she had gotten herself into this mess except perhaps that the young man had for a fleeting instant looked a little like J. E.

## 21

The rest of the day was no better. When Jane returned she was in a bad temper, and as the afternoon wore on, no amount of Bourbon from the bottom drawer was able to put off the penalties of Willie's week-end carouse. He grew more and more querulous and disagreeable until about four o'clock she said, "Willie, you'd better go home and sleep it off," and Willie, in silence, with an aching head, took down his worn overcoat and battered hat and, for once, went without an argument.

When he had gone Jane, red in the face, turned round in her chair and said, "What are you going to do about him, Aunt Vinnie? He's getting worse and worse. This afternoon he tried to pinch me."

"Well, it didn't hurt you very much, did it?"

Jane lost her temper. "Don't worry, it didn't hurt me. He never touched me, but he got a slap that he'll remember for a long time."

"Well, that's the way to treat him. A woman always has a right to defend herself."

"So that's all you're going to say?"

"What do you want me to say, Jane? You're old enough and strong enough to take care of yourself. You could knock

him down with your little finger—the little pip-squeak. Anyway, he wouldn't do anything.”

“That's a nice way for one Southern lady to talk to another.”

Mrs. McLeod wanted to laugh suddenly at the idea of Jane calling herself a Southern lady, but she managed to keep silent. Coming a little nearer to Jane she said, “Listen, Jane, Willie is a poor disappointed old man.”

“I don't care what he is.”

“If I fired him it would kill him.”

“Well, it's him or me, I've had enough.”

“The only importance he's got left is being a reporter on the *Daily Shield and Banner*. If you took that away from him there wouldn't be anything.”

Jane rose and picked up her hat and coat. “Well, I'm going back to the ranch.”

“You can't do that, Jane. I'd have to give up.”

Jane burst into tears and ran out of the office. At the door she cried, “I'm sick of it. I'm sick of Willie and the *Daily Shield and Banner*. I'm sick of everything.”

When she had gone, Mrs. McLeod stood for a moment in the center of the room, and then, dead weary, dropped into Willie's chair and covered her eyes with her hands. Suddenly she wanted only one thing in the world—to go back to McLeod's Folly and go to bed and stay there forever, never to see again people who were difficult, never again to worry over where the money was coming from to keep the *Daily Shield and Banner* going, never again to have to see Old Dougherty or to think of his evil doings. She knew suddenly that she was a fool for always believing people better than

they were. That had always been her folly and J. E.'s folly before her. If only she and J. E. had been ruthless and dishonorable and self-centered, believing always the worst of people instead of the best, the *Daily Shield and Banner* wouldn't be where it was today. And now Jane had deserted too, not, she knew, in a sudden burst of clairvoyance, because Willie tormented and tried to pinch her, but because, in spite of everything, she had been in love with Jimmy Dougherty and something had gone wrong between them. Why, she thought from the depths of her long experience, was human nature so cussedly complicated and difficult? Why, because Willie had once been the Don Juan of the county and now was old and a failure, should he become drunken and cantankerous? Why couldn't Jane be simple and direct instead of being complicated and sullen, making her and Willie and even Aida pay for the folly of herself and Jimmy Dougherty?

And in a sudden burst of despair she was sure that the young man had made a fool of her. He had got a carton of cigarettes, five dollars, and a new suit of clothes out of her. He had even gotten his freedom and run away, making her a fool and once again the laughingstock of the town.

She wanted only to go home to bed and never again set foot on the floor as women did in the old days when life had defeated them; but that, she knew, she could not do because in the scheme of things it was not permitted to women like herself. Wearily, she rose and, going to the untidy washroom, she put cold water on her face so that Willie's prim wife Myrtle downstairs would not guess she had been crying. She struggled with her untidy hair, which had given her an exciting unruly look when she was young and pretty, and

now was no more than a nuisance. When she had done this, she returned and put Willie's desk in order and then Jane's and finally her own, shuffling the pile of bills that always encumbered the top drawer, to see what bills *had* to be paid at the end of the week. She thought wildly, "I've got to carry on somehow. I can't let the *Daily Shield and Banner* die."

It would be like dying herself—even a little worse—for if she died everything would be over and she could rest forever. If the *Daily Shield and Banner* died she would go on and on, sick for its troubles and worries, for the smell of dust and paper and paste, sick even for the smell of the Bourbon that hung over Willie's desk, oddly enough, the only clean smell in the whole office.

At six o'clock she went downstairs to ask Willie's wife, Myrtle, for a little money to take the place of the five dollars she had given to the young man who made a fool of her. From Willie's wife she got no sympathy; the cashier sat behind her rusty cage, grim, high-collared, an old-fashioned school marm, distrustful of everybody and everything. Any day in the week Myrtle was bad enough, but on Mondays, after Willie's week-end carouse, she was insufferable.

Coldly she said, "I guess I can let you have a dollar and a half, Mrs. McLeod. The gas bill has to be paid or the linotype'll have to stop running."

With the dollar and fifty cents in her big, untidy bag, she walked home through the dark, along the familiar streets and across the Square where long ago she and Gashouse Mary had played when Platteville was a wide-open town. Two blocks from the Square she came upon McLeod's Folly, huge and fantastic against the clear blue of the late spring night. The sight of it surprised her, for she had, like an old woman,

been dreaming of the town as it was when she was a girl, before McLeod's Folly had been built.

Opening the rickety gate, she walked up the path between the ragged lilacs and syringas toward the dark house, depressed now by the fact that she had no appetite for supper and that Aida, with pleadings, cajolery and finally threats and abuse, would force her to eat against her will. The house was dark because Aida was a great saver of gas. Without troubling even to strike a match, she groped her way along the huge familiar hall, through the great dining room and as far as the pantry. Then she heard voices from the kitchen and knew that Aida was not alone. One voice was unmistakably Aida's, the other voice that of a man. For a second, because she was still a little confused as to past and present, she thought that Aida had returned to her old tricks and was entertaining an admirer, but almost at once she realized that Aida was nearly as old as herself and for a long time had had no admirers in the romantic sense.

With an effort she summoned the determination to push open the door, and when she had done this she saw Aida, busy over the oven, and beside her on a chair a figure which was unmistakably that of the young man who had run away. He had a notebook and was writing in it and Aida was saying, "And a lot more than that happens here. You all oughta stay in Plattesville for a spell! What you'd see would raise the hair off'n your haid."

In a second the depression left Mrs. McLeod and her appetite returned.

Aida's "misery" was gone. She was chippy as a lark and God had sent her what she wanted most. The young man was a born reformer; he was already at work, making notes.

Once her tears had subsided after running out of the office, Jane experienced a sudden vacant feeling about the heart. She found herself in the street without any idea of where she was bound. She had meant, later on, if she had left the office at the usual time, to go to the Presbyterian Church and help serve at the annual supper to raise funds for the Missionary Society; but now she was an hour too early, and if she went there directly she would, she knew, have to help with the peeling of potatoes, the setting of tables and a great many other tasks in which she found no pleasure at all. Worse than that, she would have to talk to the other women and listen to their gossip of babies and housekeeping and small town doings. Once these things would have amused her, but since she had been to school in the East she looked upon such small human interests as beneath her. Nevertheless, there was in her heart a feeling of warmth and anticipation about helping to serve at the Missionary Supper. Part of this feeling arose out of tradition, because her mother and her grandmother had both occupied themselves with the affairs of the Missionary Society and because she herself had always “helped,” except for the years in the East, from the time she was fourteen. And in her heart, she really liked the simple, friendly wives and mothers whom she would find there. They were, after all, *her* people—the old people of the county, not the country club set which she did not like, nor outsiders like the Doughertys.

So, when she came out of the office, she acted, in the perversity of her mood, against her own natural inclinations, and instead of going straight to the church, she set out to walk around the Square. Inside, she was feeling sick and

angry, so she got no pleasure out of the familiar shop windows which now, in the violence of her mood, looked not only strange to her but without interest. When she had finished one complete tour, she still did not know what to do with herself, so she made a second tour. This time, perhaps on account of the physical action, her mood changed a little and she began to feel sorry, less for herself than for the way she had behaved to Aunt Vinnie and even to Willie Ferguson. And as she softened her confused emotions gradually cleared and sorted themselves out, and she found herself thinking of Jimmy Dougherty and wanting to see him. If only she could meet him by accident, and he would come up to her and say "Hello!" as if nothing had happened ... that would be wonderful. For that she'd even chuck the Missionary Supper in spite of all her promises and go to the movies with him. And aimlessly, in spite of herself, she found she was walking toward the Dougherty Block, her head filled with romantic imaginings of what would happen if suddenly she saw him coming along Main Street toward her.

She had almost reached the doorway of the Dougherty Block when her mood changed again and she thought, "What am I doing? I'm running after a man like any cheap servant girl. I ought to be ashamed of myself." And then almost at once, logic prompting her, she thought, "What am I after anyway? I won't marry him. I can't marry him. I must be crazy."

Quickly she changed her direction, but she did not go toward McLeod's Folly or toward the Presbyterian Church. She crossed the street and went into the Boston Store thinking, "From the doorway, I can see him come out." Once inside the door she knew that she must buy something



because Miss Hamilton and Miss Reeves behind the nearest counters would wonder what she was up to and begin to talk if she just came inside and stood around. So she gave them each a bright “Hello” and took a long time looking through spools of thread to match a mythical dress which she found herself describing in nervous detail. And all the time she kept glancing toward the big, lighted entrance of the Dougherty Block. With a little jump of the heart she observed something which in her excitement she hadn’t seen before—that the olive-green roadster was standing two cars away from the entrance.

After a time even the description of the imaginary dress gave out and she knew that she couldn’t go on and on pretending, and she hadn’t enough money to make other purchases, so she paid for the spool of thread and said “Good night” to Miss Hamilton and Miss Reeves and went out of the door, aware that they were watching her, and that as soon as she was well out, one would cross the aisle to the other and begin talking about her.

Outside she found herself almost without knowing it walking to the opposite side of the street. Then as she stepped on to the curbstone, Jimmy came out of the big entrance and crossed the sidewalk to his car. At sight of him she wanted suddenly to do two things at once—one to sink out of sight, melting away into the very asphalt of the street—the other to run up to him and say, “I’m sorry about the other night. Let’s be friends again?”

In fact she did neither thing. She simply stopped and stood there on the curb, feeling foolish and idiotic and ashamed. But the worst was that she could not be sure whether he saw her or not, or even sure whether he wanted to see her or not.

In any case, he walked past her, climbed into the car and drove away, leaving her, when he had gone, with a feeling of sickness and disgust, thinking, "I must be crazy. I must be out of my mind. I'll never speak to him or think of him again."

## 23

All the time she helped with the serving at the Missionary Supper she had a bad headache. She tried not to talk to anyone and she was as polite as she was able to make herself. She served badly and spilled things and she kept thinking, "I ought to do what I threatened to do. I ought to go back to the ranch and maybe marry one of the county boys." And almost at once she began making plans for going to the state agricultural school. She decided to forget the useless things she had learned in the East which seemed only to bring her trouble, and to find out all about dairies and cheese and butter and diets for cows. By the end of the evening her headache was gone, and she was already planning how she would revolutionize her father's ranch and build up a big dairy business in Plattesville. For a time she even forgot Jimmy.

But at last the serving was over and she had eaten her own supper—a great deal more than she had meant to eat when she arrived—and there was nothing to do but go home. And as she walked along the streets from the Presbyterian Church to McLeod's Folly she thought about many things, wishing that she was not so healthy that even in the midst of sorrow and melancholy she always had an excellent appetite. For the first time it occurred to her how really lonely she was, and how odd it was that you could be lonely in the midst of a big town like Plattesville. Even at home in McLeod's Folly she was lonely because she really didn't know Aunt Vinnie or

Aida. And she saw quite clearly that it wasn't their fault; they wanted to be friendly; they wanted to share everything with her. Indeed they were always pushing and prying and hinting, trying to be intimate with her and share her happiness and her unhappiness. It certainly wasn't their fault so, she thought, it must be her own.

"There must be something about me," she thought, "that puts people off. It isn't even any better on the ranch. It must be that which has put Jimmy off me ... whatever it is."

By now she had reached the gate of McLeod's Folly, and thinking of Jimmy made her think of the perils which he had suggested might haunt the ragged bushes bordering the path, the tramps who might spring out of the shadows and attack her. She had never even thought of such things before, but now as she opened the old gate, the mere squeaking of its hinges made her hair rise on her head. For a moment she stood in the shadows listening, unable to screw up her courage to run the gauntlet of the friendly ancient syringas and lilacs. It was after ten o'clock, and as far as she could see in both directions there was not a person in sight in the shadows beneath the cottonwoods and live oaks which lined San Antonio Street, not a soul to come to her aid when she screamed.

At last she told herself, "I can't stand here all night. I've got to go up that path." So she counted ten and then started, trying not to run, although her legs kept carrying her along at a speed far too rapid for dignity and self-respect.

And then suddenly she was up the steps and putting her key into the lock. And nobody had attacked her.

As she opened the door she saw that the hallway was not as black as the economical Aida usually kept it. At the far

end there was a faint glare of light that came from the half-open door of J. E.'s library and she thought, "It must be Aunt Vinnie working late. I'll go in and say good night and apologize for having been so nasty." But it was odd that Aunt Vinnie had chosen to work in the rarely used library instead of J. E.'s den.

Taking off her hat and coat she hung them on the mahogany coatrack and started toward the library door, but she didn't arrive there, for as she reached the foot of the stair the door opened all the way and against the light appeared the figure of a man.

In a second all the terrors of the dark path swept over her again and she screamed, wildly, violently, not so much in terror of the actual figure as of the images Jimmy's warning had raised in her mind. At the sound of her screaming, the man did not stop but continued to come toward her, and between screams she heard him saying, "It's all right. It's only me," and her body collapsed at the knees and even the dim light in the library went out.

## 24

When she opened her eyes she found herself in one of J. E.'s big worn leather chairs with Aunt Vinnie and Aida in their wrappers standing over her, and just beyond them a young man with dark blond hair and steel-rimmed spectacles. Aunt Vinnie was saying, "It's all right, dear. He won't hurt you. He's living in the house." All of which made no sense at all, even when she considered that it was Aunt Vinnie who was saying it. Then Aida gave her some whisky—a big oversized drink—and Aunt Vinnie explained that this was a young man called Mr. Richardson who was coming to work

on the *Daily Shield and Banner*, and how she had snatched him from jail, and he was an investigating reporter and was going to live in the house as a boarder. And while Aunt Vinnie was explaining all this, Jane, feeling much better and much clearer in the head than she had ever dreamed was possible, examined the young man.

Even while she listened to the latest and most fantastic of Aunt Vinnie's exploits, she saw that the young man, while not exactly handsome, was nice looking. The steel-rimmed spectacles gave him an intellectual faintly owlish look, but he wasn't feeble and skinny and anemic like most intellectual young men; he had big shoulders and a fine frame beneath the suit from "Every Day a Bargain Day" Frenlich's. Even in her weakness and excitement she couldn't help thinking that his presence would make life less dreary in McLeod's Folly.

He said, "I'm very sorry to have upset you. I was looking over the library and found Grant's *Memoirs*. I always wanted to read them, but never seemed to have a copy about when I thought of it. So I just sat down and began to read."

She assured him that it was all right, and then there was a moment's awkward silence to which Aida tactfully supplied an end by saying, "Ah'll make you all some cocoa and sandwiches. That'll calm down your nerves."

So they all followed Aida into the big kitchen, and while Aida made the cocoa, Mrs. McLeod and Jane made up some sandwiches, and as the whisky began to stir in Jane's blood she suddenly felt very gay and thought that after all housework and even cooking which she had always scorned might be very pleasant. The young man didn't act at all like a stranger. He helped with the sandwiches and chatted and

made jokes, rather bad jokes, Jane thought, which set Aida off into gales of laughter.

When everything was ready, Mrs. McLeod and Jane and the young man sat at one table and Aida served them and took her place at another. It was all very agreeable, and after a time the young man began to tell them about his adventures he had had bumming his way from New York into the Southwest. After a time, listening, Jane forgot about herself and was quite happy again. She was especially happy when he said that he had been to Harvard.

“Now,” she thought, still a little tipsy from the whisky which had revived her, “I’ll have an intellectual equal in Plattesville.” For a moment she even forgot about the agricultural school and doing farming and considered him as a new matrimonial candidate. At any rate it would be nice to have a man about the house.

It was after midnight when at last they all went to bed, leaving Aida to clean up the kitchen and turn out the lights.

## 25

On Tuesday morning Mr. Richardson went to work, and from the moment he arrived at the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner* a change came over the place. In the make-up room the linotype operators punched and rattled their machines into new activity, old Zimmerman, who had been picking up and dropping type for forty-eight years, found a new interest in the worn old bits of lead. Belowstairs, even Willie Ferguson’s wife, Myrtle, unbent a little inside her cage and for the fraction of a second was seen by Mrs. McLeod to smile in a wintry fashion.

Abovestairs, in the editorial office, the newcomer was given an old desk placed near a window overlooking the Square, where he sat with his square, powerful back turned on Jane and Willie. In honor of the occasion Mrs. McLeod put on a new foulard dress. For Jane, it was again like the first day she had come to work on the *Daily Shield and Banner*, fresh out of college, filled with ideas of how to make the paper over into a modern go-getter kind of journal. (That was before she grew discontented and was finally defeated by the debts and bills, the inertia of the whole staff and the muddle-headedness of Aunt Vinnie.)

Now, as she contemplated the broad capable figure by the window, she felt a new confidence, a new excitement. Again and again during the morning she stopped in the midst of her work to study the back covered by the cheap suit from Frendlich's. There was something about it which was solid and emanated confidence. Everyone else in the *Daily Shield and Banner* was so old and so tired and bored. They all belonged to another day which Jane, in her modernity, felt was finished. Here was a young man who was modern; he was a radical; he was writing a series of special articles on the treatment of the wandering unemployed.

So far he existed for her more as an abstraction and as a symbol than as a man. Even though she had made a fool of herself by fainting at their first encounter, even though they had sat together with Aida and Aunt Vinnie in the kitchen, talking until after midnight, she felt that she did not know him. She thought him pleasant-looking—perhaps without the steel-rimmed spectacles you might have considered him handsome—but there was a kind of secrecy about him, a kind of coldness and efficiency, a way of looking at things in an

abstract fashion which put her off. It was as if he held you at arm's length, as if even in the intimacy of the kitchen, he had been regarding them all simply as specimens. Perhaps, she thought, that was because he was a Yankee, and a little perhaps because he was an intellectual.

And in spite of herself she thought again of Jimmy Dougherty, and how different he was. Even while she looked at the broad capable back she kept seeing Jimmy with his blue eyes and black hair and wide, warm, friendly grin. You knew Jimmy right away. It was as if he said without saying it, the moment you saw him, "The world is a fine place. Let's be friends." She felt that no matter how long Mr. Richardson was about you would never really *know* Mr. Richardson.

But in her minx's mind she already began to make plans. Perhaps, she thought, the newcomer wouldn't be so bad after you got to know him. Yankees were stand-offish and not easy-come, easy-go, hospitable fellows like Southerners. Perhaps he might fall in love with her and marry her and take her back to the East where she could be somebody. But even if none of these things happened, he could still be of use to her as a beau. He could take her to the movies and out to dinner at the Beauregard Hotel and to lots of places where Jimmy would see them. Never again would she have to sink to the level of buying a spool of thread in the Boston Store simply to get a glimpse of Jimmy leaving the Dougherty Block. Now she could show him that he wasn't the only pebble on the beach.

It was true, she had to admit, that on the first morning, Mr. Richardson took very little notice of her. He spent half the morning repairing efficiently the cast-off, broken-down typewriter Aunt Vinnie had given him, and the other half



studying copies of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, going over them carefully, line by line, peering intently through the steel-rimmed spectacles. She tried to ignore him and to take no notice of his indifference, but she wasn't quite able to manage it.

Out of the *Daily Shield and Banner* staff only Willie Ferguson seemed unstirred by the sudden appearance in the office of the newcomer. In him the tempo of daily existence was not quickened. Partly this was because, although he no longer suffered from a hang-over, he was in the third or Tuesday phase of his weekly reformation, when he felt sour and virtuous and disapproving of everyone. Partly too he looked upon the introduction of the newcomer as one of Lavinia McLeod's follies, and a major one at that. Being a conservative he did not like change, and having a good deal of instinct he divined before any of the others, indeed almost at once, that the young man was going to do a good deal of upsetting. And most of all he disliked the young man, because, even in the Frendlich "bargain day" suit, it was clear that he was efficient, clear-minded and energetic—all qualities which in the philosophy of Willie took the savor out of life and made of it a poor thing. And he was a Yankee and Willie did not like Yankees. But for the Yankees and General Sherman he would now be living in luxury, surrounded by slaves and mint juleps on an inherited plantation in Georgia, instead of eking out a miserable existence in a cow town in the Southwest. The Yankees, he believed, had ruined his destiny before he was born. He had been meant by fate to be a gentleman and the Yankees had cheated him out of it.

So Willie sulked, resorting more frequently to the lower drawer than was usual on a Tuesday, and now and then giving

vent to an eloquent snort or a derisive belch of which the newcomer seemed to be maddeningly unaware.

Side by side with the elation which accompanied the appearance of the newcomer, there was in the office also a sense of emotional strain. Even old Zimmerman setting up type was aware of this. It was a friendly old-fashioned office in which all save Willie Ferguson were willing and ready to take the newcomer into their arms and make him feel at home. Somehow, as the day wore on and the excitement lowered a little, the staff, one by one, became aware that this was not possible. It was not that the stranger resisted in any way, not even that he was unfriendly. He was just nothing at all, a little like a new piece of furniture, an adding-machine perhaps, wondrous and working with astonishing efficiency, but without warmth of personality.

Most of them were puzzled and made uncomfortable. Willie, as the day wore on and the uneasiness increased, grew a little triumphant as if he were saying, "See! I told you so! You can't mix Yankees down here. They're too cold-blooded!" Only Jane actually resented it. She felt, rather than reasoned, that she had a right at least to the notice of the newcomer. When she stared at the square back she expected him to turn round and speak, or at least to give her a friendly smile. Heaven knew, other men paid attention to the blue of her eyes, the amber color of her hair, the pink of her cheeks, the trimness of her figure—plenty of other men, stupid men, men who didn't even know her. But now she stared at his back and he never so much as turned, except occasionally to ask her a question about the preferred style of the *Daily Shield and Banner* or Mrs. McLeod's taste in headlines, or the name of some prominent citizen.

For the whole of the first week it went on like that. He did not even come home for supper but spent his evenings in the town, where, neither Jane nor Mrs. McLeod was able to discover. Usually he came in after all of them were in bed and went for a time to the library to work. He had taken the second volume of *The Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* off the shelves to read himself to sleep with and kept it on the table beside his bed. Five mornings out of the seven they came down to breakfast to find that he had already eaten and gone to the office. Aida said that after the third morning a letter sent by air mail and postmarked "Boston" arrived every morning for him. At the end of the week Mrs. McLeod was able to report triumphantly to Magistrate Flynn that the young man in her parole had behaved, as far as she knew, in an exemplary way and was in the process of being a worthy citizen of Platteville.

Certainly he had done nothing criminal. He had been sober, orderly, polite. But Mrs. McLeod, nervous again, was beginning to have her doubts. He was not what her romantic mind had planned; he was not playing the role she had created for him. He was not as she had hoped and believed—a ball of fire. It seemed to her that he had done nothing at all but sit at his desk, ask questions and read newspaper exchanges. Troubled, she began to think for a second time that she had been made a fool. She began to suspect that she had simply taken on a lodger with whom, in her softness, she would be burdened for the rest of her life. Out of the labor squad she had, she began to believe, simply picked up a gentleman of leisure.

What made it worse was that Willie Ferguson, aided by Bourbon, became steadily more triumphant and exasperating.

And then on the following Friday the change occurred.

In the first place, Mr. Richardson appeared in the morning dressed in a different suit, one which was not new but obviously expensive in cut and material. The shirt, tie and shoes were different, and they all had the same look, of having cost a great deal of money. Mrs. McLeod was not the only one to notice this; Jane saw it at once. He now dressed and looked like an Easterner, like those negligently dressed, self-assured young men whom she had seen in hotels and at a distance on the street in Boston. At the sight her heart gave a little leap, and the snob in her thought, "Perhaps he isn't as bad as I thought."

About eleven o'clock, carrying a bundle of copy paper covered with voluminous notes, he knocked at the door of Mrs. McLeod's cubbyhole and asked if he might speak to her for half an hour, a request which she granted with mingled apprehension and delight.

Closing the door behind him, he sat down and placed the bundle of notes on the end of her untidy desk. Then he adjusted his spectacles and looked at her and said, "I'm sure, Mrs. McLeod, that you feel that I haven't been earning my board and lodging for the past week, but I assure you I've been working hard all the time. I was a stranger here and I had to find my ground and get used to the place." He took off the spectacles, and when she looked at the honest gray-blue eyes, she knew again that the impulse at the police station had been right.

He said, "I hope you won't think me impertinent. I have a lot of suggestions to offer."

“Not at all ... not at all ...” said Mrs. McLeod. “I hoped you’d have some suggestions.”

“Shall I begin first about the paper itself?”

“Yes.... Yes.” Her tired worried face brightened, and her excitement concentrated itself in her fingers which began to drum the top of the desk.

He grinned apologetically, and for a fleeting moment he again looked like J. E. If he had had J. E.’s flowing mustaches he would have looked very like him.

Again he said, “I hope you won’t think me impertinent.”

“No, certainly not.” That was what she wanted ... suggestions, change, organization, efficiency, energy.

“Well, Mrs. McLeod, I think what the *Daily Shield and Banner* wants is waking up. I like the name. It has a fine old-fashioned, crusading sound. It ought to be a crusading newspaper.”

“That’s what I want it to be ... only ...” For a moment she fumbled and then finished lamely, “only I don’t know how to crusade.”

Again he grinned, “Well, perhaps I can help. How did the paper get its name?”

“It was J. E.’s father who founded it and called it the *Daily Shield and Banner* ... just after the Civil War during the Reconstruction.” Then she remembered that although everybody else in Plattesville knew who J. E. was, Mr. Richardson wouldn’t know, so she added, “J. E. was my husband. I took over after he got ill and died.”

Surprisingly he said, “Yes, I know. I’ve found out all about him. He must have been a remarkable man.” Then he picked up the papers and said, “I’ll begin with the newspaper first.”

And putting on his spectacles he added, "I haven't forgotten about the crusade. I've got some notes on that too."

"Good."

One by one he went over the suggestions, changes of make-up of style, added human features, a column of gossip about people in the town, perhaps even a special Saturday edition given over to the farmers and ranchers. "Their interests," he said, "are so different from those of the townspeople ... articles on cows and chickens and new vegetables ... all that sort of thing."

While she listened Mrs. McLeod grew more and more excited. The ideas, she thought, were wonderful. Why had she never had them? And then she remembered that she had had most of them, at one time or another, one at a time, but somehow nothing had ever come of them. Always they seemed to have got lost.

"You see," he said, "what we must do is to make over the paper and attract attention and get more subscribers and then the advertisers will come to us. You see, before we can be a force as a crusade, we have to have an audience. Then when we begin the crusade, subscribers and advertisers will come in by leaps and bounds."

The excitement inside her was almost more than her heart could bear. The *Daily Shield and Banner* important again! The *Daily Shield and Banner* a power in the community as it had been in J. E.'s day! The *Daily Shield and Banner* a great crusading paper! But a small voice kept speaking to her, presently with such force that she said aloud, "But all this will take a great deal of money. I've told you the *Daily Shield and Banner* was hard up, but I never told you how badly off we really are."

“No,” he said, “it won’t take much money, hardly any at all to begin with. I’ve figured it all out. But it’ll take a lot of work.” He took off his glasses again and lighted a cigarette.

“Miss Baldwin,” he said. “She looks young and strong. She’s willing to work, isn’t she?”

“Yes, Jane ... why Jane’s as strong as an ox. Sometimes she’s difficult though.”

“Yes,” he said, with a faint grin, “I’ve noticed that. I think work would do her good. It might make her less difficult.”

For a moment Mrs. McLeod resented the remark, thinking it presumptuous and even “fresh.” He saw the look in her eyes and said, “Forgive my saying that, but if we’re going to do this thing, we must all feel friendly and frank and confident.”

“Oh, that’s all right. We can manage Jane, I guess.”

“I don’t suppose Ferguson will be much help.”

“No, but I can’t get rid of him.”

“Well, I guess we can manage.”

And then he took up the second sheaf of notes. “And now as to the crusade. I’ve been digging about a bit into that.” He took up the notes and said, “I’ve been getting acquainted in town. You see, it’s no good working a job like this till you know your ground.”

Then he told her what he had discovered, here and there, in poolrooms and restaurants and saloons. He couldn’t be as unfriendly as he appeared to be, because he seemed to have made friends with all sorts of people and got all sorts of information out of them, bits and oddments which had never reached the ears of Mrs. McLeod herself, fresh scandals and hints of villainies perpetrated or contemplated by Old

Dougherty and his gang. And as she listened Mrs. McLeod grew more and more excited, the weariness went out of her, and she felt young again as she had in the days when J. E. was still alive and attacking corruption wherever it raised its head. It was all wonderful, all far beyond her expectations.

When he had finished she said, "Well, I must say you haven't been wasting your time."

"There's still the question of State politics. I don't know exactly how this man Dougherty stands with the State party organization."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, a crusade is no good unless you've got plenty of backing and power. If we're going in for politics, if we're really going to clear out the Dougherty gang, we've got to know where we stand."

Mrs. McLeod was silent for a moment, thinking, and then said, "Well, I have heard stories about a feud between Dougherty and Swain. Bill Swain is the State boss. But I don't know how true it is. They say Old Dougherty's got an ambition to take Bill Swain's job away from him."

A new light came into the gray-blue eyes. "Well, if that's true it's fine. It's just what we're looking for. I heard rumors of the same thing."

"When can we begin our crusade? Next week?"

Mr. Richardson laughed, "Not so fast. I'm still on parole as a vagrant."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, until that parole is up they can clap me back into jail any time and put me to work digging ditches."

"How, if you don't do anything?"



Again he laughed, this time at her naïveté, so that she was ashamed and blushed. “Oh, they’d find a way. They’d *make* me do something. That’s easy enough.” His face grew serious again. “No, for the next couple of months we’ll make over the *Daily Shield and Banner* into a first-class modern newspaper. And by that time we’ll have all the cards ready.”

“You mean you’re going to stay in Plattesville for a long time?”

“Sure, I’m going to stay here until the job is done.”

She held out her hand and he took it, “Then it’s a bargain.”

“Yes.”

“The paper is yours to do with as you like.”

“That’s what I wanted you to say.”

At that moment, quite suddenly, she thought of Gashouse Mary. She’d have to go right off to see Mary and tell her what had happened. She couldn’t tell her before now; she couldn’t tell her about the young man until she was sure of him. Now she *knew*.

Aloud she said, “Have you been to see Gashouse Mary?”

“You mean the woman who runs that dance hall by the river?”

“Yes.”

“No, I don’t know her.”

“Well, I’ll take you there. When shall we go?”

“Tonight?”

“Tonight.”

Then he left her, and when he had gone she sat for a long time staring out of the dirty window into the park, seeing nothing, bubbling inside with elation. It was wonderful to

feel young again, to feel that thirty years had slipped away suddenly. Wildly she thought, “I must pull myself together and be efficient now.” And feeling that she must begin at once, she thought, “I must straighten up my desk first,” so she went to work on it sorting out papers, trying to produce some order out of the chaos, doing her best to make it look like Mr. Richardson’s desk—neat, precise, orderly. And in her heart she knew all the time that by the next day chaos would have returned.

When she had finished she went outside to find Jane, for she had planned to have lunch with Jane in the Pasadena Cafeteria and tell her everything that had happened; but Jane was not there. Willie said she had gone out half an hour earlier saying she wouldn’t return until two o’clock. She knew what that meant. Jane was sulking again.

## 27

It was true. Jane *was* sulking. Unable any longer to bear the sight of Mr. Richardson’s indifferent, tweed-covered back, she had flounced out to have lunch alone, and no sooner had she found herself in the street, than she found herself walking toward the Dougherty Block.

Impatient, she had, after a week, given up hope of rousing interest in Mr. Richardson; all she wanted now was to forget him. She wanted Jimmy and his grin back again, more than she had ever wanted them. She wanted something that was human and impudent and even wicked. She wanted to show that conceited Yankee Mr. Richardson a thing or two.

Three times she walked up and down the street in front of the Block, but there was no sign either of Jimmy or the olive-green car. And then, as if a fever had suddenly gone out of

her, she came to her senses and thought, “I must be crazy. What will people think if they see me walking up and down here like an idiot? What is it that gets into me and makes me like that?” And angry now at herself, she turned and went down toward the river to Kirschbaum’s restaurant where she was sure she wouldn’t see Aunt Vinnie. At that moment, she felt, Aunt Vinnie’s simplicity and calm would have been insupportable.

The lunch was good, but she was unaware of what she ate. With the first volume of Grant’s *Memoirs* propped in front of her she sat there for an hour, trying to make out what on earth Mr. Richardson found interesting in such a book. And now and then she would find herself staring for a long time at the pages without seeing anything but Jimmy’s grin and blue eyes.

When she returned to the office, Mrs. McLeod called her into the cubbyhole and closing the door, told her everything. As she listened, she seemed untouched by enthusiasm, and when her aunt had finished she only sat there silent and a little sullen.

“Well,” said Mrs. McLeod, “why don’t you say something? Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Yes, if it’s true—if it works out.”

The remark was like a dipperful of cold well water on Mrs. McLeod’s enthusiasm. She said, “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that your Mr. Richardson hasn’t got enough pep to carry anything through. He’s nothing but a cold fish.”

Mrs. McLeod saw through that and felt better. Calmly she said, “Well, we’ll see. Anyway, it’ll be more interesting. Only you mustn’t tell anyone. If anyone finds out, it would ruin

everything. They might clap Mr. Richardson right back into jail.”

Jane rose with an air of great weariness. “Who could I tell in this cow town?”

Then Mrs. McLeod took the bull by the horns. “Jimmy Dougherty,” she said, and waited for the explosion.

There wasn’t any. Jane only opened the door, and on her way out said, “I never see Jimmy Dougherty. What do you think I am, going around with shanty Irish like that?”

After the door closed, Mrs. McLeod felt dashed for a moment and then understanding came to her, and she knew that Jane wouldn’t have talked with such violence about “shanty Irish” if her feelings had not been strong. She knew it was true that Jane hadn’t seen Jimmy Dougherty for a week, but she knew now that Jane wished she had seen him.

She thought, “That’s going to make the crusade all very difficult—with her doubting Mr. Richardson and feeling as she does about Jimmy Dougherty.”

A month ago everything had been clear and simple as crystal, and now suddenly it was all complicated again. She turned to her desk and discovered that already in some mysterious way it was in utter disorder, a disorder rather like that of her own mind.

“It’s no use,” she thought wearily. “I can’t keep anything straight.”

Then she took up the telephone and asked for Gashouse Mary’s number. When the familiar voice answered, she said, “He’s turned up.”

“Who?” asked Mary’s voice.

“The young man I was looking for ... the one who’s going to help me with the crusade.” Then hastily she told Mary of how God had sent him to her.

But Mary’s voice was cautious. “Are you sure of him?” she asked.

“I’ve never been surer.”

“It’s better to be careful, Mrs. McLeod. You know how you are.”

“Yes, I know. I’ll bring him down tonight after supper and you can see for yourself.”

“Okay, I’ll be in the dance hall. But I wouldn’t talk too much over the telephone.”

After that she forgot the untidiness of her desk and felt better again.

## 28

Gashouse Mary’s evening began early, vaguely about eight o’clock, depending upon the number of barges and river boats that were in town at the moment. The El Dorado dance hall was nearly as garish as the original had been in the days of the land rush. Moved by a sentimental feeling for the past, Mary had modeled the new El Dorado as nearly as possible upon the old. It was a vast barrack-like room with a long beer bar at one end and a lunch counter at the other, where sandwiches and hamburgers and hot dogs were to be had. Along one side there was a kind of cattle pen where the “hostesses” were kept between dances. Overhead the beams were left bare and ornamented with garlands of colored paper and the flags of all nations. The center was given over to dancing, save for the railed-in square at one side where the

negro jazz band played from eight o'clock until there were no longer enough customers to make it profitable. Notably it differed from the old El Dorado in two things: there were no tables of roulette and faro and poker, and the hostesses were, as Gashouse Mary put it, "refined," which meant that, herded together in their pen, they looked rather like a convention of gay but respectable school teachers. Actually they were girls who worked during the day, some as clerks, some as hired girls, some in millinery shops and department stores. At the El Dorado they could dance in the evening and earn money as well, five cents on every dance and two and a half cents on each glass of beer. Gashouse Mary would not have at the El Dorado what she referred to as "professional doxies," adding, "of course I can't say what the hostesses do after they leave here, but while they're here they've got to be refined."

And so, despite the clientele of river men and roughs from the town, a kind of hard-boiled decorum prevailed in the El Dorado. Watching the spectacle, studying the lined, hard-worn faces of the men, a stranger would have wondered what it was that kept their passions in control. There were, in fact, several reasons: there was no hard liquor, and Gashouse Mary allowed none to be brought into the place; there was something about Mary herself, elegantly dressed, and seated at her table near the long bar, which imposed a restraining influence—something in the dignity of that tightly corseted figure crowned by the complicated coiffure of dyed hair that filled the heart of the toughest longshoreman with awe and apprehension; and in case the dignity failed, Mary had the best chucker-out on the whole river. His name was Jake, and he was built like a gorilla. He was not quite bright, and peaceable enough under normal conditions but a demon when

roused. A blow on the head from a bottle actually gave him pleasure.

The El Dorado was, in fact, an efficient and money-making institution, the result of sixty years of experience in frontier and river towns, beginning long ago when Mary had first played in the Square during the days of the land rush.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson arrived, and the dancing was already going full blast; every seat at the bar and the lunch counter was taken, and all the girls from the cattle pen were busy with customers. Gashouse Mary was waiting for them at her table, dressed in a tight-fitting dress of purple merino, in the style which she described as "semi-evening" and wearing all her collection of garnets. It was clear that she had made a special effort for the occasion. She sat facing the door and the dance floor as she always did, so that she might keep an eye on the proceedings. From this position she was also able to watch the bar and the amount of business done there. Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson took seats opposite her.

When she had ordered beer for them she said to Mr. Richardson, "Well, I certainly am glad to meet you. Mrs. McLeod told me about how she picked you up in the police court."

While she was ordering beer and inviting them to sit down, she had been engaged in a process she called "taking in." This meant that shrewdly, out of years of experience, she was drawing her conclusions about the young man. She had no preconceived notions and no theories; she simply relaxed and allowed her instinct full play. She liked the shape of his head, and the stubborn chin and the rather thin mouth, the straight nose and the square forehead. But most of all she liked the

honest, almost innocent look of the eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles. Almost at once she told herself, "This fella is on the level. If you crossed him he might be a tough customer. He ain't a natural fighter, but if he got ideas about something he'd fight to a finish. He ain't the kind of man I'd choose for myself, but he might be all right for other things."

They talked for a time about this and that—the girls, the weather, the music.

"Good music," said Mr. Richardson, raising his voice to make himself heard above the cacophonies of the negro band.

"Not good but loud," said Gashouse Mary. "That's what they want. Excuse me a moment." She rose and crossed the dance floor to a couple who, lingering near the rail, were jiggling up and down. As she crossed the room her companions saw for the first time that the purple "semi-evening" had a slight train.

She spoke to the couple and they moved off. When she returned she said, as she sat down, "I don't allow no rough stuff here." Then suddenly, as if she felt that they had talked banalities for a long enough time, she said to Mr. Richardson, "Now, tell us about yourself."

While permitting her instinct free play she had noticed two or three things—one that his clothes were much too good for a newspaperman; they were too expensive and they showed too much taste and care in selection. They were what she called "tony," not what the late Mr. McGovern with his taste for checks and red neckties would have called "tony," but the real thing. She knew "tone" when she saw it, although she had not seen it more than a half-dozen times in her checkered life. It was something special, expensive and careless. And his speech, like his clothes, was "tony." She knew what that



was too. To herself she thought, “He ain’t any common ordinary newspaperman if he’s a newspaperman at all. And he’s not as slow as he looks. Maybe Vinnie McLeod has found the right guy.” And for a second, hope rose in her vast bosom and excitement at the thought that here might be the means of getting back at her enemy, Old Dougherty.

But Mr. Richardson held his ground and revealed nothing more than he had already told Mrs. McLeod. Then suddenly he grinned, a grin that was both unexpected and illuminating. It lighted up the impersonal bleakness of the face and revealed unsuspected depths of warmth and humor and experience. At the sight of the grin, Gashouse Mary’s instinct told her, “He’s been around too. He’s no parson.”

He said, “I guess you think I’m pulling your leg, but I’m not. I’ve done everything there is to do on a newspaper. I know it all sounds sort of fishy, but you’ve got to take my word for it.”

Then, before she could answer, the door opened and her trained vision told her that someone unusual was coming in the door. She was silent and Mrs. McLeod followed her glance, turned and saw Jimmy Dougherty stepping across the threshold. He was a little drunk so that he moved unsteadily, and with him was a girl in a green suit and a red fox fur with a tiny hat placed on the back of a head covered with platinum curls. She was young, but she had a hard face and a big mouth. Mrs. McLeod remembered having seen her somewhere before now. She was very different from the dance hall girls, with their cheap dresses and home-set waves.

Gashouse Mary leaned forward a little and started to rise, then thought better of it and sat down again.

“I don’t like him coming here and I don’t like her either.”

“Who is she?” asked Mrs. McLeod.

“She is the daughter of poor old Hedges, the plumber. Gone gay. It’s bad for the morals of the girls when they see her fox fur. I don’t like doxies coming here. I’ve told her to keep out. She wouldn’t dare come in except with Jimmy Dougherty. He’s got a nerve too—after what I told him and his old man the last time I saw them. I’d throw him out too, only I’ve just got things patched up again and it would cost me money.”

Then Jimmy Dougherty turned and saw them, and leaving the platinum-haired girl at the bar, he came unsteadily over. When he reached the table he said, “Good evening, Mary. Good evening, Mrs. McLeod.” Then he turned directly and insolently at Mr. Richardson without speaking. To Mrs. McLeod he said, “I just wanted to tell you to give my love to Jane.”

“I’ll tell her,” said Mrs. McLeod.

“Thank you.”

Then abruptly, unsteadily, he made his way back to the bar. Intoxicated men, all except Willie Ferguson, always made Mrs. McLeod nervous, and now she felt a little sick at the sight of Jimmy Dougherty because she couldn’t help liking him.

Gashouse Mary was saying, “He’d be all right if he’d get away from that hellion of a father. Jimmy ain’t a bad sort himself.”

But Mrs. McLeod scarcely heard her because she was thinking of Jane and wondering whether she should deliver Jimmy Dougherty’s message. If she told Jane the whole story,

about where he was, and what condition he was in and whom he was with, it ought to finish off the whole thing and leave her hands free for the crusade. But somehow she didn't want to deliver the message or tell Jane anything of what she had seen.

Gashouse Mary said, "I guess I can get away for a minute. Come on into the parlor." She raised her voice and yelled "Jake!" and the chucker-out, who was standing near the door, lumbered over to the table, his huge hands hanging somewhere about his knees.

"Listen, Jake," she said, "if there's any trouble send for me before you do anything."

"Okay!" said Jake.

Gashouse Mary rose and with dignity led the way through the door near the bar into the parlor. There, beneath the enlarged portrait of the late Mr. McGovern, the three of them held a conference which lasted for more than an hour. It was Gashouse Mary who outlined the campaign. She knew about politics. She had a political following of her own and she volunteered to warm them up discreetly, without giving away anything, to the idea of running the Doughertys out of power. Mrs. McLeod was to get hold of Sam Henderson and Jim Newman and start them to work quietly organizing the old-timers in the county. Mr. Richardson was to go ahead with modernizing the *Daily Shield and Banner* until the time came for them to act. There was plenty of time—nearly eight weeks before Mr. Richardson's parole would be up. The light of battle came into Mary's eyes. She trusted Mr. Richardson. She had given her instinct time and her instinct had told her that Mr. Richardson was okay.

“Maybe it’ll be Old Dougherty instead of Gashouse Mary who’s chased out of town.” She slapped her big thigh with a loud whack. “That’d be good. That would.” Then her eyes narrowed a little and she said to Mr. Richardson, “And you’d better not try any double-crossing, young man.” She said that just in case her instinct had been a *tiny* bit wrong.

“You can count on me,” said Mr. Richardson.

“The only thing I can’t make out is why in hell you’re taking the trouble to help clean up a cow town full of strangers like us.”

“I guess it’s just because I like cleaning up places. It’s kind of a disease with me.... I like fighting and I like fighting for the underdog.”

And out of her long experience with reformers, Gashouse Mary said quickly, “I suppose it *is* kind of a disease.” It was the first time she had ever found herself on the side of the crusaders. She didn’t like them. She didn’t feel at home with them, and even now she wasn’t quite sure that she was safe.

When they went back again into the dance hall, Jimmy Dougherty and his girl were gone. They had another beer, and as soon as Jake, the bouncer, saw them, he came over to the table, scratching his head.

“Sorry, Mrs. McGovern, but I had to throw out young Dougherty.”

“My Gawd! Why?”

“He knocked a guy down who said something fresh to that moll with him. There wasn’t time to come and tell you. I threw ’em all out, the moll too.”

“Okay,” said Gashouse Mary. “Only I’d like to have been here.”

When Jake went away she said, “Well, I suppose that means more trouble.” But her spirits weren’t crushed. In the bright old eye there was a new light. She liked politics and she liked a good fight and she hadn’t had one since Mr. McGovern died.

## 29

Outside in the remnants of the mud from the flood Jimmy Dougherty picked himself up. The man he had knocked down was already vanishing in the mist that rose in the moonlight from the river. He felt dizzy and his head ached, and Fern Hedges, the plumber’s daughter with the platinum hair, was standing over him.

“Why didn’t you hit him?”

“I knocked him down, didn’t I?”

“I don’t mean him. I mean Jake.”

Jimmy looked at her. “Are you crazy?” he asked. “You might as well try to throw a rhinoceros.”

“Anyway, how dare an old bat like Gashouse Mary throw us out?”

“She didn’t know anything about it.”

“Oh, yeah? She’s been after me for months. She don’t like my competition.”

“Maybe.” Jimmy, in the dim light from the single bulb over the door, was trying to remove the mud from his clothes. He did this laboriously, painstakingly, without much result.

For a time Fern stood watching him, then she said, “Well, are we gonna stand here all night?”

“I don’t want to go back to town looking like this.”

Her voice softened a little as she said, “We don’t need to go back to town. You can go home with me and I’ll clean you up.”

“I’m not going home with you.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t want to.” He set his hat straight and said, “Come on, I’ll walk back with you.”

Through the mist they walked past the shuttered houses and the bawdy music of Franklin Street and up the hill toward the town. Neither of them said anything for a long time. It was Fern who spoke first. She said, “What’s the matter? I was countin’ on your comin’ home with me.”

“Nothing’s the matter.”

“Drunk ... that’s what you are.”

“I am not.”

“I suppose it’s that girl reporter on the *Daily Shield and Banner*. I know you’ve been running around with her. Thought you were pretty smart, but I knew it. Everybody knows it.”

“Leave her out of it.”

“I won’t leave her out of it. Why should I? She’s no better than I am. I know about her.”

“If you don’t shut your trap, I’ll sock you too.”

She stopped and began to shout, “That’s what you would do. I know you—a Dougherty. Dirty Old Dougherty’s son. The old pimp. You can’t talk to me like that.”

Finally he took her by the arm. “Stop that yelling,” he said, shaking her. “Stop it, right now!”

“I won’t! I won’t! Let me go!” And now instead of shouting she began to scream, “Help! Help!”

He let her go and started on up the hill, but she did not follow him. She simply stayed there screaming. Without turning he walked on, and in a moment he heard the sound of her footsteps running to catch up with him. As she came up behind him she said, “That’s right. That’s just what you would do ... leave me alone in a part of town like this, full of bums. Anything might happen to me....” Then she placed herself in front of him so that he couldn’t advance and cried, “Anyway, I couldn’t meet anybody who’d treat me worse than you have ... laying hands on a woman. You’re no gentleman—if you were a Southern gentleman, you’d know better. You’re nothing but a damned Irish Yankee. I’m going home alone and if you dare follow me I’ll scream for help. I’ll scream till you can hear me in Memphis.”

She turned and hurried away up the hill, and he remained where he was standing, looking after her. At the corner under the street lamps she turned her head quickly to see if he was following, then she went on again, a little more slowly. When she had passed the light he turned up a side street. He didn’t follow her so she had no need to scream again.

Walking along the dark street he was, in his tipsiness, lost for a time. It was a narrow street lined by dreary cheap houses that pressed in like the walls of a shabby narrow canyon. He did not much care whether he was lost or not. He felt sick and corroded by disgust at himself and over the behavior of Fern. He had known her always, since the days when the Doughertys were new in Plattessville and few people knew them or spoke to them. He had gone swimming with Fern on spring days when they were both ten. He had known

her in grade school and in high school where as the “fast girl” she went brazenly her own way and sometimes his. He had come to think of her as an old friend and now she behaved like any streetwalker.

“Which, I suppose,” he thought tipsily, “is what she is.” He couldn’t imagine why he had never thought of her like that before, except that he’d always known her. Then he felt sudden remorse at his condition, and instead of going to Hennessey’s saloon as he had planned to do, he turned his steps as he reached the end of the narrow street, toward home.

Once, when the Doughertys had first come to Plattesville, it would have been a short walk but now it was a long one, for since nine years Old Dougherty had lived in the best part of town in a big florid house that represented his Gaelic idea of splendor. Built in the Tudor style, which had very little to do with the Southwest, it stood back from Fleming Avenue surrounded by clumps of the most expensive shrubbery laid out by a landscape gardener from St. Louis. It was, in its way, the McLeod’s Folly of a later generation.

In half an hour Jimmy, still a little unsteady, turned in between the globular lights which marked the steps leading up to the big veranda. There was, he saw, a light in what the architect had called the library, so he knew that his father was still awake. He wasn’t pleased at the prospect of seeing the Old Man, not because his father would object to his condition, but because Jimmy was aware, more and more of late, that he was twenty-six years old and it was time that he was settling down.

When he had let himself in with his latchkey he went directly to the library, steadying himself with a great effort of



will in the hope that his father would not notice his condition. He had, he thought, succeeded admirably until the moment he entered the room where the small shrewd blue eyes of the old man looked up from the pile of papers that rested on his chest and he said, "Well, been at it again, have you?"

He was lying on the sofa, his shoes off, his feet resting on the end. He was smoking a cigar and had, it was evident, been making figures on the sheets of foolscap that adorned his chest. Behind, in the shadows, were the dim rows of shelves almost innocent of books. For the first time in his life Jimmy was aware for some reason of their bareness.

He grinned, a little foolishly, the effort making his face feel as if it belonged to someone else. "Sure," he said, "why not? I was out with Fern."

"Hitting it up, ain't you?"

"Well, now and then a fellow's got to enjoy himself."

"You don't look as if you'd been having much fun. Who threw you in the mud?"

He had forgotten the mud. Looking down at his blue suit, he saw that he looked as if he had been rolling in the river bottom. If he had remembered he would have sneaked upstairs somehow, in spite of everything.

Again he grinned, "I got thrown out."

"Where from?"

"The El Dorado."

"Didn't you fight back?"

"I might have once. Did you ever see that bouncer Jake? It wasn't worth getting a black eye and maybe a chewed ear."

"Glad to see you're getting some sense." He sat up and put his feet on the floor. "But Gashouse Mary's got a nerve—

throwing a Dougherty out of any place.”

“She didn’t know anything about it. She was in the parlor talking to Mrs. McLeod and that new guy she’s got working for her.”

“What new guy?”

“That guy she saved from a vagrancy charge. He’s a reporter.”

“Oh, *him!*” The old man took up the whisky bottle and poured his son a drink. “Here, sit down and take some of this. I want to ask you a couple of things.”

Jimmy sat down in his big loose way and took the drink. “Shoot,” he said.

“What’s been the matter with you these last ten days?”

“Nothing. I haven’t noticed anything....”

“Seems to me you’ve been off your feed.”

“Mebbe.”

“Workin’ too hard?”

“Mebbe.”

“How’d you like to take a couple of weeks off fishin’ at Galveston?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“And there’s something else.”

“Yeah?”

“You get around a lot more than I do. What’s old Mrs. McLeod up to?”

“I don’t know. Nothing, I guess. I haven’t noticed anything.”

“What about tonight?”

“I hadn’t thought about tonight.”

“Well, I’ve been thinking ever since you told me. What was she doin’ at Gashouse Mary’s?”

“Mebbe she’s gonna write a story about the place.”

“She ain’t modern enough for that. And what did she have that bum along with her for? What were they talking about in Mary’s parlor?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t in there.”

The small blue eyes of Old Dougherty narrowed. He crushed out his cigar and said, “Well, it smells bad to me. Gashouse Mary would like nothing better than to fix us—the bitch! And old Mrs. McLeod has been bitten by reform ideas for a long time—ever since J. E. died.” He lighted another cigar and said, “What’s the reporter guy she picked up like?”

“I don’t know. He looks all right—looks pretty smart. He’s an Easterner. It’s written all over him.”

“What’s he meddlin’ around here for?”

“Don’t know.”

“Well, it looks to me like he might be one of them damned radicals.” For a time he studied the end of his cigar. Then the jaw hardened and the mouth grew thin and straight and he said, “You get around more than I do. It’s up to you to find out what’s going on. If the old lady has got any reform ideas we’ll just have to strangle the paper. That’s easy enough to do.” He looked directly at his son and said, “You been going around with that niece of hers, haven’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you might get some information out of her.”

“That’s no good. That’s busted up.”

“What’s the matter? Wouldn’t she give in?”

“It wasn’t like that. She’s not that kind of girl.”

“There must be something wrong with your technique.”

“Let’s lay off her.”

“Okay.”

Jimmy finished the drink in silence and put down the glass. After a minute his father said, “You look kind of peaked to me. Better go to bed and sleep it off, and tomorrow we’ll talk about that fishing trip.” Jimmy rose and started toward the door. “Only remember what I said. If they start anything, we’ve got to stop it quick before they even get started. It wouldn’t have made so much difference a couple of years ago. But with Bill Swain in strong at the capital it’s different.”

“Sure,” said Jimmy and went out of the library and up the huge stairway to his own room. But when he got into bed, he couldn’t sleep. For two hours he lay awake in the darkness trying to collect and put in order his thoughts and emotions. He was dissatisfied with himself and he could not discover why. He had never felt like that before in all the twenty-six years of his life.

## 30

Belowstairs in the library Old Dougherty finished his figuring and put away the papers in the safe built into the wall just beneath the portrait of his wife. Then he lay down again on the sofa and for a long time looked up at the picture. It was not a good painting, but it had a certain photographic quality which he had always liked and which now brought her back to him very clearly. It was the portrait of a gentle, serene face, with graying hair and the same blue eyes that looked out of Jimmy’s handsome face. It had been painted for

this room in the “new house” which had marked an upward stage in the fortunes of the Doughertys—the “new house” built for her in which she had never set foot because she was dead before it was finished.

He missed her tonight. He had never ceased missing her. In the beginning she had come of a much better family than his own, and she had been willing to marry him in the face of every opposition, and she had, he knew, put up with him and a great deal of which she disapproved, because that was the way she was. Jimmy was like her in his looks and in his easy-going nature; and when she died Jimmy was only seventeen, and she left her son in his care, hinting gently that the boy should take up some other career than politics. If Old Dougherty ever knew a troubled conscience, it was over his failure to follow her hint. He hadn’t paid much attention to Jimmy one way or another. He’d always been so busy working and fighting that Jimmy had grown to young manhood without much guiding. But he was, Old Dougherty reflected, a good boy—wild, yes, but he wouldn’t have wanted a son who hadn’t a bit of the devil in him. And after all, it was inevitable that Jimmy should go into politics. Otherwise that good-looking face and the personality and manner which charmed people would have been wasted.

The old man felt tired tonight, with a weariness which had come over him more and more often of late. Lying on the sofa in his stockinged feet he was sick of politics and the worries that went with them. He would have liked nothing better than to have gone to Galveston himself, only it wasn’t possible for them both to be away at the same time, and Jimmy looked and acted as if he were the one who needed the change.

Presently, for lack of attention, his cigar went out, and in disgust he threw it away and fell to dreaming about how good it would be to go back to Daytona, maybe go there for a whole winter with nothing to do but drink and play horseshoes and fish and muck around a bit on the beach. He wouldn't regret leaving the house because he had never been attached to it; it was too big and so pretentious that when he took off his shoes and made himself comfortable, he felt ashamed. And with no woman to run it, it wasn't a home anyway—just a big ornate barracks which had been a mistake from the beginning. His wife would have liked it; she had had enough class to dominate it and she could have made it human. He couldn't blame Jimmy for going out every night in the week and only using it as a place to sleep. It was pretty dreary for a young fellow; a boardinghouse would have been livelier.

The striking of the big, showy, expensive clock in the hall roused him to the knowledge that it was two o'clock and time he got some sleep. Thrusting his big feet into his felt slippers he switched off the light, leaving the library with its empty shelves in darkness and climbed the stairs. He would send Jimmy to Galveston tomorrow morning for a couple of weeks. He was always afraid of Jimmy's drinking, and it was a good idea to nip it right at the start. And he wanted Jimmy to be in the best of spirits and behaving himself when the annual Democratic barbecue and home-coming came off. In his Irish bones he had a feeling of presentiment. Somehow this year, the barbecue and home-coming was going to be of greater importance than it had ever been.

When Mr. Richardson and Mrs. McLeod returned to McLeod's Folly the house was in darkness, and they discovered that Jane had already gone to bed. In the hallway, while Mrs. McLeod was taking off her hat and coat, Mr. Richardson said to her, "Do you mind if I work late in the library? You see, I'm writing some articles, and I'll have to do it late at night, outside office hours."

"Of course not." Because she was sure of him and feeling full of warmth and friendliness, she wanted to cry out, "I'm writing a book too." But in the same moment the old shyness swept over her so that she found herself blushing at her presumption and quickly added, "Use anything you like in the house. I want you to feel at home here. Act just as if it was your own place."

Suddenly she felt like settling down to a good talk. Excitement and confidence had driven all weariness out of her, and she wanted to break through that odd wall of reserve which surrounded her "discovery" and find out what he was like. She hadn't any reserve herself, and she always felt friendly and intimate toward everyone.

The desire came to nothing because before she could even propose a cup of hot cocoa in the kitchen, he was saying politely, "I won't keep you up any longer. I've a lot of work to do," and left her no choice but to go upstairs to bed. For a moment she thought of going to J. E.'s den to do some more revising on The Book, but she quickly gave that up. She was far too excited to do any work of that kind. Tomorrow would be Saturday, and she would go to Jim Newman's and tell the old boys who gathered there about her clean-up campaign. She must set to work quietly organizing the county.

Upstairs she passed Jane's door and stopped for a moment to listen to the quiet breathing which told her that Jane was asleep. She was glad of that. Now she wouldn't have to give Jane Jimmy Dougherty's message and have to say where she had seen him and with whom and that he was a little drunk. Tomorrow she could pretend to herself that she'd forgotten.

## 32

On Monday morning the revolution began. It began the moment that Mr. Richardson arrived at the office and seated himself at the old desk overlooking the Square. Everyone in the office, even Willie Ferguson through a haze of Bourbon fumes, knew it at once by something in the atmosphere. The change became definitely apparent when at ten o'clock Mrs. McLeod, with a stagy air of authority and confidence, emerged from the cubbyhole and announced that there was to be a conference—the first conference in the long history of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. For a conference it was necessary to have a table, so while Mrs. McLeod went into the composing room to summon old Zimmerman, the make-up man, Mr. Richardson cleared off the files of newspapers which occupied the long table in the center of the room.

Days, weeks, perhaps months and years had passed since the sacred files had been moved and the table properly put in order, and Mr. Richardson's activity raised clouds of ancient dust which filled the room and set both Jane and Willie coughing. Jane coughed loudly out of injured vanity, and Willie with immense ostentation in order to demonstrate the evil and unsanitary effect of innovations. And at last Jane opened the windows admitting, in an unconsciously symbolic gesture, the fresh balmy air of the early summer.



When all this had been done, chairs were placed round the table and the staff seated themselves, Mrs. McLeod at one end, Mr. Richardson at the other and Jane, Willie Ferguson and old Zimmerman at the side. Mr. Richardson was about to open the conference, when Willie uttered an objection.

“If this is going to be a real conference,” he said, “I think Myrtle ought to be here—seeing as how she runs the business end.”

Mrs. McLeod said, “You’re right, Willie. Go and fetch her. And tell Alf he can lay off the linotype and keep the business office until we’re finished.”

Gloomily, with foreboding pantomimed in every line of his skinny body, Willie descended to fetch Myrtle while the others sat in strained silence. When the husband and wife returned, Myrtle, in her high immaculate collar and with her most disapproving air, took her place at the table beside Willie and everything was ready. At the table only Mrs. McLeod seemed enthusiastic and stirred by the joys of anticipation. The others, all save old Zimmerman, were hostile. He betrayed no emotion whatever; he simply went on chewing tobacco.

Mr. Richardson rearranged the papers on which he had made notes, and clearing his throat, began:

“Mrs. McLeod,” he said, “has kindly asked me to submit suggestions for the reorganization of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. I have outlined some changes and improvements, none of which is very difficult and none of which requires the expenditure of much money.”

At this Myrtle gave a sniff rich with meaning, and at the sound Mr. Richardson smiled at her respectfully and said, “Mrs. McLeod has explained to me the financial difficulties

of the *Daily Shield and Banner* and I have taken all that into consideration. It is my hope that in a few weeks or a few months the changes and improvements will show such results that we shall be able to undertake larger and more comprehensive ones.”

He paused for a moment, and going through the papers said, “In the beginning the burden of work involved will very likely fall on my shoulders, a situation which I am quite prepared to accept.”

Around the table, one by one, the confreres began to be impressed, first by the seriousness and dignity which young Mr. Richardson managed to impose upon an occasion which none but Mrs. McLeod had meant to take seriously and without cynicism; secondly, they liked the sound of the big, slightly pompous words he used—the young man had authority and it was evident that he was used to speaking in public. Mrs. McLeod beamed with pride and pleasure like a mother whose son has won everything on school prize day. Myrtle fussed with her jabot and sniffed as if struggling to resist. Jane was really impressed, because what he was doing was exactly what she had meant to do a year ago when she first came to work with her Aunt Vinnie. She was impressed, too, by the firmness, clear-headedness and decision of Mr. Richardson. She felt suddenly that he was the kind of man who took hold of life firmly and calmly and bent it to his own ends. In Willie’s heart admiration and resentment struggled for domination. Old Zimmerman simply sat, his face growing more and more solemn, giving no sign of life save the rhythmic cowlike movements of the jaws as he chewed.

Quietly, firmly, Mr. Richardson went on, outlining one by one the changes he proposed to make, taking them up one by

one with the persons concerned, so that each one of them was in turn flattered by his deference and attention. Jane, brightening, put in her own objections and some new ideas about a whole page devoted to the county and another given over to the interests of women. These she volunteered to take on herself. At first, Myrtle objected to everything on the grounds of expense, but slowly, with a knowledge which surprised her and made her humble, Mr. Richardson brought her round to his side. With tact and flattery he suggested that Willie Ferguson should undertake a gossip column full of small items of news, personal and flattering, concerning the citizens of Plattesville. And Willie, because he was a born gossip and had a sense of humor, and sometime during every day put his nose in the door of every poolroom and saloon in Plattesville, liked the idea and in spite of its being Monday morning, warmed up to it. When it came to old Zimmerman's turn, he accepted every suggestion, not by words but by gulping noises. His face, old and leathery, seemed to grow paler and paler beneath the strain of Mr. Richardson's impressive conference manner.

The conference lasted for more than an hour, and at the end Mr. Richardson said, "We'll begin the changes with the Monday edition. In the meanwhile we'll say nothing about it to anyone, and on Saturday I'll write an editorial calling attention to the new *Daily Shield and Banner*." He paused, took off his glasses and added, "We can only accomplish this by coöperation and working together as good fellows for the pride of the job and the tradition of what was once and will be again one of the great newspapers of the Southwest."

This was actually received with applause by Jane and Mrs. McLeod into which Myrtle joined with a slightly acid tapping

of the hands. Willie, reinforced by a stealthy visit to the bottom drawer, actually cried, "Hear! Hear!"

"If you all agree," continued Mr. Richardson, putting on his spectacles once more, "we will make these conferences a weekly affair—say every Monday."

"Yes, yes," said Jane with enthusiasm.

"Thursday," said Willie, thinking of Saturday night and Sunday, "would be a better day."

"All right, then," said Mr. Richardson, "let us make it Thursday."

Old Zimmerman, quite white now, gulped his approval.

Then Mrs. McLeod, beaming, rose to her feet and said, "Now I think we should all give some sign that we are in agreement with Mr. Richardson and his ideas. I think," she said (remembering her Women's Club days), "that a vote of thanks would be in order. All in favor will say 'Aye.' "

There was a chorus of "Ayes" about the table from all but old Zimmerman. Suddenly, inexplicably, in great haste, his face green now with anxiety, he leaped from his chair and ran from the room. For a second there was a startled silence, and Mrs. McLeod said, "What on earth is the matter with Mr. Zimmerman?"

It was Willie who answered with a wicked chuckle, "There ain't nothin' the matter with him except he's never been to a conference before. He's been swallowin' tobaccy juice all through the goings-on."

## 33

During the rest of the week Mr. Richardson devoted moments now and then to the individual encouragement of

each member of the staff. With Mrs. McLeod this wasn't necessary; on the contrary he was compelled to exercise restraint now and then to prevent her getting ahead of herself; she bubbled and boiled with enthusiasm and herself kept having ideas which, as Mr. Richardson was forced to point out, were far beyond the narrow limits of the cash they had to work with. But the spirits of the others rose and fell, according to their moods. Jane, in a personal way, was certainly happier than she had been and scuttled about, now to the library, now to the bookstores to purchase women's magazines and agricultural papers from which she shamelessly stole ideas, suggestions, and whole articles, rewriting them in her own glib style for the new woman's page and the page devoted to gardening, poultry and the dairy.

"What we want," Mr. Richardson kept saying, "is individual stuff, with a personal local touch. All this bought-up mat stuff will never get us out of the hole."

Her doubts as to his ever having been a newspaperman were quite vanished now; he knew his stuff; he knew every technical term; he knew even how to run the linotype and set headlines. In short, he seemed to her to know everything, to be, indeed, God-like in his journalistic all-knowingness. There was only one thing he did not know and that was how to be intimate and warm. He was, Jane thought, much too much of an efficient machine. Nevertheless, the new régime pleased her; for one thing she was no longer treated to the spectacle of a tweed-covered, incommunicative back.

It was not only in the realm of ideas and plans that Mr. Richardson busied himself; there was the simple matter of house cleaning. For the first time within memory the editorial

office was set by the ears. Cupboards and files were opened; mice nests and ancient documents were discovered, even a whole packet of J. E.'s editorials written in his own hand, for which Mrs. McLeod had been searching vaguely for years. Dust rose in clouds. The ancient floor was scrubbed and Willie Ferguson's spittoon placed on a square of metal. The ragged old files were bound together. And last of all the whole was given three coats of fresh new water-green paint. When Mrs. McLeod grew troubled about the expenditure, Mr. Richardson only said, "Leave that to me. Don't trouble your head about it—you'll see!" and again for the moment she had a new doubt—that she had rescued from prison a man who was bent upon ruining her.

At last came Saturday night and Mr. Richardson's editorial about the new *Daily Shield and Banner*.

It was calm, dignified, impressive and a little pompous, like his speech at the conference, and it occupied a whole page near the center of the paper. It began by reviewing the glory of the origin and the past of the *Daily Shield and Banner* with dignified compliments to the memory of J. E. McLeod and of his father. Then it proceeded to the history of Platteville itself, from its beginning as a settlement on the frontier, through the days when half-wild cattle and horses roamed the whole range of the big country, through the wild wide-open days of the land rush, to the importance of Platteville's modern and latest stage.

"The *Daily Shield and Banner*," wrote Mr. Richardson, as if he were Platteville's oldest inhabitant, "has always been representative of the best life of the county and the new *Daily Shield and Banner* will continue to be so, burgeoning, we hope, into a new and modern version of the excellent

newspaper founded long ago by old Angus McLeod who helped to rescue the great Southwest from the villainies of Mexican tyrannies, and carried on so ably by his son, the late J. E. McLeod, and latterly by his widow, Mrs. Lavinia McLeod.”

Originally he had written—“his widow, one of the best known and respected citizens of our community.” But Mrs. McLeod, assuming all the authority she was able to assume, objected to the phrase and had it cut out because, she said, it made her feel foolish.

In closing the editorial Mr. Richardson quoted gracefully from the earlier writing of the late J. E. himself, out of one of his own editorials found among the mice nests at the bottom of the cupboard.

“Plattessville has always been a city in which we may all take pride; our county with its plains and hills and salubrious climate might well be the envy of all citizens of this great and glorious nation. It has always been an honorable and forward-looking community and the *Daily Shield and Banner* means to fight eternally to keep it so.”

It was, even Willie and Myrtle Ferguson agreed, a mighty fine editorial, which restored the self-respect and roused the spirits of everyone connected with the *Daily Shield and Banner* down to the boys who delivered it to the scanty list of Plattessville subscribers. And outside the office it was a bombshell which, an hour or two after the last copy was off the press, had set half the town to talking. Those who did not yet know about Mr. Richardson thought with a certain cynicism, “Just another of Vinnie McLeod’s brainstorm,” and others said, “Where on earth is Vinnie getting the money?”

By Sunday morning most of the town was awaiting the Monday evening edition with impatience and anticipation.

## 34

Probably the most interested of all Plattesville's citizens was Old Dougherty. That Saturday night he sat with his stockinged feet up on the end of the sofa, reading the editorial through again and again. He did not like the sound of it, and he wished that Jimmy were here to discuss it with him instead of fishing in Galveston and trying to forget that niece of Mrs. McLeod's.

As he grew older he felt more and more the need of Jimmy at his side to back him up. When the boy was away there were times when he felt tired and old and lost.

More ominous than anything in the whole editorial was that last paragraph in which J. E. McLeod, who died before Old Dougherty ever came to Plattesville, spoke from the grave. He did not like the smell of that line which read, "Plattesville has always been an honorable and forward-looking community and the *Daily Shield and Banner* means to fight eternally to keep it so."

Old Dougherty had no illusions; he did not deceive himself. This declaration was in direct and blatant opposition to his own ideal for the future of the city. He meant to keep Plattesville in his pocket.

That night Old Dougherty did not fall into a heavy sleep the moment he climbed into the vast bed in his pseudo-Tudor palace. He lay awake for a long time thinking and planning and making notes on the memorandum pad which lay on the night table beside him—notes of information he must ask



from Hirsh, the new business manager of the *News*, about the *Daily Shield and Banner's* debts and its dealings with paper companies. Hirsh would undoubtedly know the answers.

Like a great spider he lay in the Grand Rapids Louis Quinze bed, spinning the web with which Mrs. McLeod and the *Daily Shield and Banner* might, if necessary, be caught and destroyed.

In his heart he didn't want to ruin Mrs. McLeod because he liked her the way you like an old worn-out pair of shoes, but if she started anything he might be forced to ruin her in order to save himself from ruin, perhaps even from prison. He wasn't afraid of her, but he was afraid of the ball which she might start rolling. And that little squirt whom old Flynn, the magistrate, had permitted her to nip out of jail under the very noses of all of them! If they'd only guessed what he really was, he'd be emptying garbage cans at this moment into municipal street-cleaning trucks. Old Dougherty knew well enough where the editorial had come from. It wasn't from the pen of poor muddle-headed Lavinia McLeod. It was written by somebody who was damned smart—too damned smart for his own or anybody else's good.

## 35

On Monday the new *Daily Shield and Banner* appeared. Although the type was unchanged, it had been so reorganized and so rearranged that the whole paper gave the effect of having been reborn. It was, a great many people said, like a brand new newspaper. Where it had been old-fashioned and rather stuffy in appearance, it now seemed thoroughly modern. The news stories which once had been lifted bodily a day late out of metropolitan papers were rewritten, each

with a twist which gave local interest. And the choice was different. Mr. Richardson left out the dull stories and took those which had human appeal.

The Monday edition included as novelties, Willie Ferguson's gossip column and an article by Jane Baldwin on the subject of making Platteville a floral city with flowers and gardens where only empty lots and rubbish heaps had existed before. And there was a special article by the editor, Lavinia McLeod, upon old-fashioned recipes for jams and preserves, recipes which had been forgotten, save by a few old women living in villages and on ranches in the county who still exhibited their jams and preserves each year at the county fair. Although her name appeared nowhere it was Gashouse Mary who had contributed three of the recipes. Also there was another editorial by Mr. Richardson, in which he declared that although the paper intended to guard and cherish the tradition of the old *Daily Shield and Banner*, it had a new policy which was to make the DAILY SHIELD AND BANNER *the* newspaper of the town and the county, a newspaper so personal, so typical of the county itself that people all over the United States would know and even perhaps read it.

It was the first time that an article signed by a name had ever appeared in the columns of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, and this lent to the newspaper a personal touch and warmed the hearts of those who signed the articles. Even the veteran, Mrs. McLeod herself, felt at the sight of her name in print, a new youth and something approaching celebrity.

Willie's column was excellent, a compound of small bits of personal intelligence, stories and bits of observation gained from a long life of Bourbon and lady-killing, and for the first

time in twenty years he appeared in the office utterly sober on a Monday morning. He was, in his anticipation of the great day, so sober that he felt self-conscious and a little ashamed before the astounded glances of the whole office.

On Tuesday, a little before noon, the first new subscription was received by Myrtle Ferguson in her cage belowstairs. By three in the afternoon there were seven more, and the day closed with a total of nine. There were, too, telephone calls of congratulations which kept Mrs. McLeod flurried and inefficient throughout the afternoon. And late in the evening just before the office closed, Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, president of the Women's Civic Club of Plattesville, telephoned to Jane to say that at the meeting of the club during the afternoon her article about beautifying Plattesville had aroused so much interest that a committee had been formed to undertake the planting of flowers and shrubs. Would she, Mrs. Jenkins asked, accept an honorary membership in the club and act as one of the committee?

Flushing with pleasure and embarrassment, Jane accepted, and when she left the office she went at once to the library to take out books on gardening, and as soon as she arrived home she wrote for a dozen seed catalogues. She knew nothing whatever about gardening, but now that she was garden editor she would have to learn, not only about flowers but about vegetables, and enough so that the committee would never discover her ignorance. And it wasn't only gardening that occupied her mind. She had her page for the women on Thursdays and the county page on Saturdays. Life, it seemed to her, for a whole day, had never been so full and so exciting before.

That night, about eleven o'clock, they held a celebration in the kitchen—Mrs. McLeod, Jane and Mr. Richardson—with cocoa and spoon bread and Aida seated apart at a small table, listening. Although there was nothing stronger than cocoa they were all a little drunk. Even Mr. Richardson seemed pleased in his detached way. It was, in fact, simply another conference from which Willie and Myrtle Ferguson and old Zimmerman were absent.

Mr. Richardson's head, it seemed, was simply a repository of inexhaustible ideas for brightening up the *Daily Shield and Banner*. One after another he brought them out and they took them up and discussed them. Aida too joined in the discussion, and presently she too had an idea.

“What about the colored folks?” she asked. “We ain't got any newspaper. We ain't got any way to read about ourselves. There's a powerful lot of colored folks in Plattsville and they all buy vittles and clothes and they all got votes too, and a lot of 'em have got money too.”

And so, from Aida's suggestion, was born the Friday night page given over to the recording of fish fries and births and deaths and the doings of the African Baptist Church.

Mr. Richardson asked, “But who's going to do it? It ought to be a colored person.”

Aida supplied the man. “My cousin Athena's got just the boy. He's been to Tuskegee. He's a poet but he doan make much money at it, and he'd like to pick up a coupla dollars a week extra money.”

“Aida, you go round tomorrow morning and tell him to come in and see Mrs. McLeod. Tell him she's got a job for him.”

And then he had another idea. He said, “There ought to be somebody in the county who could write some articles about Plattsville in the old days. That would go big with all the old citizens, and there are thousands of new ones who’d like to know about all that—some good colorful articles like that ought to attract a lot of interest, not to mention paving the way for the crusade.” He turned to Mrs. McLeod and said, “Do you know anybody who could do them?”

The question threw her into confusion. She blushed and stammered, and at last she was able to say, “No, I don’t, but maybe I could find somebody.”

It was Aida, in her enthusiasm, who revealed the secret. She said, “Why don’t you tell him about The Book, Mis’ McLeod?”

“No ... no,” said Mrs. McLeod, blushing more wildly than ever.

“What book?” asked Mr. Richardson.

“What book?” repeated Jane.

“It’s nothing,” said Mrs. McLeod.

Aida was determined now. Putting down her cup of cocoa she said, “Why, Mis’ McLeod has been writin’ away on a book for years. It ain’t about nothin’ else but the old days in Calamos County.”

Jane regarded her with astonishment, and Mrs. McLeod, still miserable, said, “It’s nothing at all—just some things I set down so I wouldn’t forget.”

“Let me see it,” said Mr. Richardson, “it might be just the thing.”

“If you want to ... I guess it would only bore you. Anyway, I guess you couldn’t read my writing. Nobody can but old

Zimmerman.”

“We could get it copied out by a typist.”

“It’s awful long, and it would cost a lot of money.”

“I guess we could manage that somehow. It would be worth it to the paper. It would soon pay for itself.”

Mrs. McLeod didn’t answer him because she couldn’t. She simply felt speechless and shamed. But Mr. Richardson, as she already knew, was not one to give up. He said, “You give me the manuscript and I’ll get in a stenographer.”

“She couldn’t read it either,” said Mrs. McLeod.

“Well, she can come to the office and work near you, and when she gets into trouble you can help her out. Agreed?”

“I’d rather not.”

Mr. Richardson laughed, “Come now, you’re a veteran journalist—you’re no schoolgirl.”

“All right ... maybe.” But she blushed like a young girl, and it was clear that Mr. Richardson had won another victory.

And then the old kitchen clock banged twice and Mrs. McLeod said, “For heaven’s sake, it’s two o’clock and we’ve all got to work tomorrow.”

So they all rose, and when Mrs. McLeod stayed behind to give Aida belated orders for the next day, Aida said, “What I tell you, Mis’ McLeod. That young man’s a ball of fire, he is.... And now the colored folks is gonna get into the newspapers. I knows a man when I sees him. He’s a mighty white fella even if he is a Yankee.” She gave a wicked, triumphant chuckle. “And now I’s gonna read that book. I’ve been itchin’ to read it for several years now.”

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday brought new subscriptions and for the office a growing sense of excitement. The very character of Willie Ferguson, gossip writer and columnist of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, began to change, and with the change and the stream of subscriptions, Myrtle Ferguson in her freshly painted cage belowstairs began also to alter. She grew softer, less forbidding; the high old-fashioned starched collar itself disappeared altogether to be replaced by feminine open collars, crocheted at home in the evenings. In the composing room old Zimmerman changed his shirt in the middle of the week, an event unknown before in the history of the paper. On the second Monday he wore a collar and necktie the entire day, and Willie hurt his feelings by asking him if he was all dressed up to go to something special.

Mr. Richardson went right ahead rising early, working all day at the office, circulating in the town during the evening and returning late to McLeod's Folly to sit up till the early morning writing in J. E.'s library at his book. But in spite of all this activity it was evident that he was becoming slowly aware of Jane. Seated at the same desk, they went over the paper together each night as the first copy rolled from the old-fashioned press, criticizing, looking for ideas and improvements. At first he sat at one side of the table, but after three days, he looked at her suddenly and said in his stiff odd way, "May I come and sit beside you? I think we could work more easily that way."

And Jane, with a rush of pleasure, moved her chair a little further to one side and said, "Of course. Please do."

Sometimes they went together to the library to seek information, and sat in the reading room going over magazines which had to do with architecture, gardening and

city planning. And there were more cocoa parties in the kitchen late at night when he seemed for a time to relax and grow almost human and intimate.

But his behavior and his very personality continued to puzzle her. She had never before met a young man who seemed so completely indifferent to her charms. He had a way, despite all her efforts to the contrary, of keeping everything between them on a perfectly professional level, and this attitude only made her the more interested. She didn't hate him any more, perhaps because he no longer treated her as if she were a provincial half-wit, but took her into his confidence and asked her advice; or it may have been simply that she was growing used to him. And slowly she began to discover that he was not dull-looking at all but handsome. There were things about his appearance to which she became definitely attached—things like the angle of his jaw, and the back of his neck and the little ghost of humor that came and went in the gray-blue eyes behind the steel-rimmed glasses, and of course the big shoulders under the worn tweed. One morning she even wakened thinking, "Maybe after all, I was just a fool about Jimmy Dougherty. Maybe it didn't mean anything at all." But all the same the minute she thought of Jimmy his presence returned, and suddenly she couldn't any longer see the square jaw, and the humorous gray eyes and the big shoulders, but only Jimmy's carefree grin and dark head. And she felt suddenly hungry for his warmth and the way he had of reaching over and touching her hand or arm when he felt a sudden wave of affection.

For ten days she did not know what had become of him. When she passed the Dougherty Block by accident now, since the paper and Mr. Richardson absorbed her interest, and



never driven as she had been before, there was no sign either of Jimmy or the olive-green car. It was Willie Ferguson's gossip column which enlightened her. On the second Monday she read it: "Jimmy Dougherty, we have just learned, caught a record barracuda last Tuesday at Galveston where he is spending a couple of weeks on vacation. Two days earlier he landed one of the biggest sailfish ever caught in the gulf. He expects to return on Monday next."

The information gave her a sudden shock. She thought, "So that's where he's been ... off enjoying himself, going away without saying a word to me." She knew now. She was sure that he never wanted any more from her than he could get from a girl like Fern Hedges. And she blushed at the memory of that evening on the little lake at Millersville when she had been foolish enough to imagine that he meant to propose and he had only asked her if she wanted a job on the *News*.

So, quite firmly, she resolved to put him out of her mind, and concentrate on Mr. Richardson—not that she meant to capture the newcomer or to marry him, but only because if she concentrated on him she would forget Jimmy more quickly.

The annual barbecue of the Democratic party was still weeks away, and long ago Jimmy had asked her to go to it with him; but that, of course, had been before the quarrel at Millersville and she supposed that the invitation no longer held good. But she couldn't help wondering, at moments when her mind was not under control, whether, when he returned, he might not use it as an excuse to patch up the quarrel. And she knew in her heart that if he asked her she would go.

Then suddenly one evening Mr. Richardson said to her, “I think we’ve all been working pretty hard. What about coming out to dinner and going to the movies with me? Everything is going fine on the paper. A little relaxation would do us good.”

They dined at the Beauregard Hotel and had cocktails, and Mr. Richardson relaxed more than she had ever seen him do before. The dinner was excellent—thick Texas steak and French fried potatoes and fresh little green peas. They began talking about the paper, and suddenly Jane said, “I thought we were going to relax and not talk shop?”

He laughed and said, “You’re right. I forgot. The trouble is, I can’t think of anything else. I’ve never enjoyed myself so much before.”

What she wanted, what she hoped for, was that he would break down and talk about himself, about his book, about the letters always in the same handwriting with a Boston postmark, which were waiting for him every evening on the table in the vast hall of McLeod’s Folly. In spite of his efficiency, in spite of the fact that he was twenty-nine and she was only twenty-three, she sometimes felt the older of the two. She experienced a growing desire to help him to enjoy himself, to give him some of that reckless animal abandon which Jimmy had in too generous a quantity. She wanted, in fact, to loosen him up and at the same time she wanted, as a woman, to satisfy her curiosity.

“Have you always worked on newspapers?” she began awkwardly.

“Ever since I was a kid, except when I went to college.”

“Oh, I see. A self-made man.”

At that he laughed. “Yes, I suppose so.”

“Well, I must say, you don’t show any signs of it.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, your clothes for instance.”

“Yes, what about them?”

She leaned over boldly and felt the tweed of his sleeve.

“Well, don’t forget I’ve been in the East too. I know what clothes cost, and I’ve seen how self-made men dress—I mean that boys who work their way through college don’t wear that kind of tweed.”

He laughed, “You should have been a detective instead of a newspaperwoman.” Then after a drink of wine, he said, “Well, I’ll tell you. There’s nothing mysterious about me. I’m a professional newspaperman and, if I do say it myself, a good one. And some day I’m going to have a lot of newspapers of my own. I’m a radical in politics. I believe in change. I believe it so much that I had a row with my father before I came here. And when I told your aunt I wanted to stay in jail, I meant it. Nothing could have got me out except your aunt and her proposition. The times are changing. Something died about 1920 and it’s only beginning to admit it and lie down. The future is going to belong to the fellows who understand what’s happened and are ready for it.” He laughed again, “And maybe some day if I have some time off I might run for President of the United States. For the present that’s all I’m going to tell you.”

“Which isn’t any more than I knew before,” said Jane, “except maybe the running for President.”

He had made her feel young again and that made her angry. And she didn’t like the way he came right out and hit the nail on the head.

“By the way,” he said, “I’ve got to go up to the capital for a few days next week and I want to leave you in charge.”

“Why?”

“Because you’ve got the best brains and the clearest head in the office.”

“Aunt Vinnie’s been running the paper for thirty years. I guess a couple of days won’t upset her.”

“It’s not the same thing.”

“Why?”

“Well, because she’s tired and you’re up-and-coming and have the makings of a first-class newspaperwoman. When I have to leave for good you’ll have to carry on.”

“Maybe I won’t want to stay on forever working on a newspaper.”

He grinned and said, “Well, I don’t say that it isn’t pretty certain that you’ll get married. Even so you could carry on. Married women nowadays have jobs—lots of them.”

“Thanks. I’ve got other plans.”

He didn’t say anything to that but asked for the check.

During the silence while he paid, she watched him narrowly, a little surprised that she felt about him the same way she had felt about Jimmy in the very beginning. It was an emotion oddly compounded of admiration, liking, resentment and fascination. In the beginning she had resented Jimmy’s attitude about women; he treated them as pretty, silly creatures whom he adored and who were made for his delight and entertainment. Now in Mr. Richardson she felt something of the same attitude, only with him it was more mental, perhaps, she thought, because he was a radical and an intellectual. There were times when they both treated her as if

she were a joke, a very pretty and charming joke, but a joke all the same. "That," she thought angrily, "is because of the way I look. If I wore flat heels and horn-rimmed spectacles and didn't use any make-up, they might respect me as a person." But in the same moment, she knew that she couldn't do without their admiration. It was to win their admiration that she dressed as prettily as her slender income allowed; it was for that she looked at herself twenty times a day in the mirror. "Why," she thought, "couldn't Mr. Richardson leave sex out of it?" But at the same moment she knew that without the titillations produced by sex, their relationship would be excessively dull. Why, only a week or so ago she had been furious because he paid her so little notice. "I'm a fool," she thought, "just a plain muddled fool. I've got to get things straight, if I'm going to get anywhere."

He had lighted a cigarette while the waiter poured more coffee and said, "I've been reading your aunt's book. The first chapter is typed out. It's pretty good and just what we're looking for."

"What do you mean by pretty good?"

"I mean, it's original stuff, and the first chapter is swell. If she keeps it up all the way through there's money in it for her."

"I hope so. She deserves it."

"I wouldn't have believed it. I mean I didn't think she had that much sense of organization in her."

"Maybe it wasn't organization. Maybe it was something else. That old life she loved better than anything in the world."

"Yes, that's true."

He finished his coffee and waited for her to finish hers. Then he said, "Shall we go?"

But she didn't answer him. She didn't even hear the question. She was looking over his shoulder at the doorway. Instinctively, he turned to look.

In the doorway was standing Jimmy Dougherty. He looked thin and hard and sunburned. He glanced round the room and then saw them. For a second he simply stared; then he bowed and turned and went out.

Mr. Richardson said, "Who's that? I've seen him some place."

"It's a man called Jimmy Dougherty." Her voice sounded weak and far away.

"Oh, yes, now I remember. I was at the El Dorado when he got thrown out."

"Thrown out?"

"Yes, he and some platinum blonde. He sent you his love. I guess he must know you pretty well. Didn't your aunt give you the message?"

She stood up suddenly and, turning away from him, said in an odd, quiet voice, "If we're going to the movies, we'd better be on our way."

The film wasn't very good but it was heavily sentimental, and halfway through the picture Mr. Richardson leaned over in the darkness and took her hand. "Do you mind?" he asked. "It really doesn't mean anything."

Quickly she withdrew her hand and said, "I do mind. If it's just a question of holding something I can get you a department store dummy." And suddenly she was aware that the tears were running down her face and that she dared not

let him see she was crying, because he might think it was the idiotic film or even himself who had caused the tears. The funny thing was that she'd been hoping all along that Mr. Richardson would take her out and even hold her hand, and that Jimmy would see them together. She had meant to show him that he didn't mean everything to her, and that there were other men who thought her attractive. But now she hadn't any sense of triumph at all. It wasn't at all the way she had expected it to be. She only felt sick inside and desperate.

## 37

Mr. Richardson's visit to the capital was made to call up the State Democratic leader, Bill Swain. Only Mrs. McLeod, Gashouse Mary and himself knew this and none of them betrayed the secret, for as each week passed they became more and more secretive. It was, of course, simple enough for Mr. Richardson, whose very nature was tight and secretive, and with Gashouse Mary she had learned long ago out of experience with tough politics in river towns to keep her own counsel. With Mrs. McLeod, it wasn't so easy. She went about the office and the town looking like the cat that had just swallowed the canary, wanting to cry out to everyone, "If you knew what I know. If you knew the tornado that is going to break over Plattesville on the third of next month!" There were moments when she had to bite her tongue to keep silent, moments especially after she had paid a visit to Gashouse Mary and Jim Newman's undertaking establishment and heard how the organizing was going along the river front and in the county. There were moments when, in her excitement, she felt she must jump up and down and shout in order to contain herself any longer. For the first time in her life she

began to have an exciting feeling of importance, and she made fresh efforts to smarten up her clothes and keep her hair neat, although the efforts came to no more than they had ever done.

There wasn't only the excitement of the coming campaign against Old Dougherty; there was also The Book. Day by day, a wretched stenographer, called Miss Willet, seated beside her inside the cubbyhole, struggled to decipher the secrets of the mysterious scratchy handwriting, interrupting Mrs. McLeod a hundred times a day when she found herself absolutely stumped by a word or a phrase. To Mrs. McLeod the emergence of The Book into the realm of human communication was a breathless experience. Each night as fresh pages emerged clear and neat from the typewriter of the stenographer, she read them, fingering each page lovingly. The emergence was to her a kind of miracle, as if a new book had been born with which she herself had had nothing to do. The feeling helped to stifle her morbid modesty and self-consciousness, and she found herself thinking, "But it's really pretty good. I can't have written it. I must have been possessed." And she began to ponder about spirit writing, and whether she was a medium and The Book had been dictated by some spirit—perhaps the spirit of J. E. himself while she sat there locked in his sacred "den" working. And shyly she watched Mr. Richardson and his reaction to each new dozen pages.

All he ever said to her was, "It's good. It's just what we need. We'll begin using it the day we start the campaign." And he said it casually, with indifference, leaving her disappointed. What she wanted was someone to tell her that it was marvelous, that it was the greatest book ever written.



There were times when she wished that Mr. Richardson would be enthusiastic just once, about something, anything at all. She told herself that he behaved thus because he was a Yankee; that fact, to her as to Willie Ferguson, always explained anything queer about Mr. Richardson.

On the other hand, his cold-bloodedness was, she found, a great asset to the *Daily Shield and Banner*; there was never any danger of Mr. Richardson going off half-cocked, or undertaking anything which had not been carefully prepared in advance. Look what he had accomplished already, all those new features, and twelve hundred and seventy-nine new subscriptions!

So when he went to the capital to see Bill Swain, her heart sank and she asked herself what she would do while he was away. It didn't seem possible to her that she could run the paper even for two days without him. But she felt better when he came in just before leaving for the train and said, "I've left all instructions with Miss Baldwin. I didn't want to burden you with a lot of details. You're busy enough as it is—what with The Book and everything."

She wished him good luck, and after he had gone, as she watched from the window his square shoulders moving across the Square, she knew that she needn't worry. He would probably get what he wanted. He had a letter in his pocket to Bill Swain from Gashouse Mary, introducing him and explaining that he had come to seek support of the Boss against Old Dougherty. Bill Swain and Gashouse Mary were old friends, and it wouldn't be the first time they had found themselves fighting shoulder to shoulder. Usually the battle had been against reformers, but this time they were

themselves the reformers, which struck Mrs. McLeod, as indeed it struck Mary herself, as being pretty funny.

But when the shoulders had disappeared in the direction of the railway station she felt depressed again, because she knew that Mr. Richardson had left the office in charge of Jane instead of herself, not for the reasons he gave but because she was nothing but an old flibberty-gibbet whom he couldn't trust. But she was glad for Jane's sake. It would give her a feeling of superiority and make her get on better with Mr. Richardson. "If only," she thought, "Jane would fall in love with Mr. Richardson and marry him instead of crying over an attractive scamp like Jimmy Dougherty." Then maybe Mr. Richardson would stay on forever and the *Daily Shield and Banner* would be safe and secure and prosperous until she herself died, and even long afterward.

## 38

In his office in the Dougherty Block the wily old spider knew that Mr. Richardson had gone to the capital, and he knew exactly why he had gone and even the day and the hour when he had a conference with Bill Swain.

The feud between Old Dougherty and the State leader was not a new one. It had been going for twenty years, since the moment the two men met for the first time at the State Democratic Convention. At that time both men were bursting with ambition, and the goal of their ambition was the same—to become State boss, and after that an influence in national politics and finally a senatorship in Washington. At that time Bill Swain had a great advantage over Old Dougherty: Bill belonged to the county. He stood six feet two in his stockinged feet and was thin as a rail and had a long narrow

leathery face. And he was still near enough to the land rush days to go shamelessly collarless in hot weather, wear a ten-gallon hat, and be able to hit a spittoon at twenty feet. Old Dougherty, who had not yet become "Old" Dougherty, was squat and powerful with the bullneck of a wrestler, and he spoke not with the broad drawl of the Southwest but with the echo of a Galway brogue. Bill's methods in politics were those of the frontier barroom, and dance hall; Dougherty's were those of a Boston ward heeler. But what Dougherty lacked in background he made up in evilness. At double-crossing he far outdid Bill Swain.

At the very moment they met for the first time they bristled with mutual dislike like a pair of strange fox terriers circling about each other with every hair standing upright. Bill Swain regarded Dougherty as an intruder, a "furriner," an immigrant invading territory to which he had no right, and he let Dougherty know it. And because Dougherty had a feeling of inferiority upon the subject of being a newcomer and an outsider, the knowledge did nothing toward making him love Bill Swain the more.

So for twenty years, in the politics of the Southwest, they had battled or bargained with each other, moved by hatred and ambition; and at the end of twenty years Bill Swain had the advantage. He ruled the party in the State and had an influence all through the Southwest. But Old Dougherty was strong; he had Plattesville in the palm of his hand and all one corner of the State under his thumb, and he had built up an organization on the model of Irish politics in Boston and New York, a far more solid and efficient and menacing model than the loose-built machine of Bill Swain.

And Bill, sitting in his hot office in the State capital, knew that in the whole of the region he controlled, there existed only one menace to his power and authority and that was Old Dougherty. He would have liked to have crushed him, the way one steps on an insect and crushes it, but he was a little afraid that Old Dougherty might turn out to be a scorpion rather than a mosquito, and as yet he could not quite do without him.

So when Mr. Richardson arrived in town with a note from Gashouse Mary broadly hinting at what was up, Bill Swain took his long legs off his desk, spat ten feet, hitting the spittoon accurately, and said to his secretary, "Telephone the hotel and tell Mr. Richardson to come right over heah."

They liked each other on sight. Bill Swain said, "Take a seat and tell me, how is Gashouse Mary? She's been a friend of mine for mighty near forty-five years." He grinned and spat and said, "Matter of fact, it was Gashouse Mary who taught me about life. I was just a kid about eighteen, ridin' the range and knowin' more about horses and steers than wimmin. She was a pretty good teacher too—better'n any I've found since."

At this intimate revelation of Bill Swain's past, Mr. Richardson grinned too, and said, "She's all right. Seems to be doing pretty well except that she doesn't get on very well with Old Dougherty."

"No, I guess she wouldn't get on with that maverick. He never did understand people like me and Gashouse Mary." Slowly, like the opening of a carpenter's rule, the long legs unbent, straightened, and found a resting place on the desk. He picked up Mary's letter written on mauve paper with gold

initials and said, "She writes me that you all are renovatin' the *Daily Shield and Banner*."

"Well," said Mr. Richardson, "that's what we're hoping to do. It's succeeding very well up to date."

Bill Swain put down the letter and turned his tiny shrewd gray eyes on Mr. Richardson. "You all had much experience with politics?"

"A tolerable amount."

"Where?"

"In the East mostly. In Illinois too."

"Gashouse Mary tell you anything about the sitchasin' here?"

"Yes. Gashouse Mary and Mrs. McLeod and I've picked up a good deal on the side."

"Vinnie's a mighty fine woman, but she ain't got much sense."

"No," admitted Mr. Richardson, "I guess she hasn't."

"It's a long time between drinks, as the governor said," remembered Bill Swain, pounding on the table with his iron fist.

The door opened and a pretty young woman came in. "Miss Bradford," he said, "tell that black Ananias to bring in the Bourbon."

The young lady vanished and in a moment an elderly negro came in bearing bottles and glasses. Bill Swain poured two stiff drinks and said, "Here's to crime," and emptying the glass, said to the servant, "Leave the bottles here and skedaddle." Then addressing Mr. Richardson he said, "And now we'll get down to instances."

For two hours they talked and on the next day Mr. Richardson came back again and they drank more Bourbon and talked some more, and on the third day when he came back to bid Bill Swain good-by, Bill slapped him on the back and said, "Good luck to you, son. I'm for you. Let me know how things are gettin' on. Only remember one thing, Bill Swain's never gone off half-cocked yet. You gotta show me a good clean bill of sale. If I believe in it, I'll come in with all four feet." He spat and then said, "And give my love to Mary and tell her I never forgot what she done for me when I was young and in need of instruction."

On the third day Mr. Richardson returned to Plattesville and came directly to the cubbyhole. When he had asked the stenographer to go out and get some air in the Square, he took off his coat, sat down with deliberation, put on the steel-rimmed spectacles and took a sheaf of papers from his pocket. While she waited, Mrs. McLeod thought she would burst with anxiety. At last, when he was settled, he said quite calmly, "Well, it's all right. He'll back us up to the very end. He's wise to the fact that Old Dougherty is double-crossing him and trying to take over his job. He'll be ready with the works when we open the campaign, only it's got to be a good campaign."

He showed no enthusiasm. The only sign he gave of an inward excitement was that he used slang words.

## 39

From the moment of his return, one thing after another happened in quick succession. On the following morning there was a telephone call for Mr. Richardson, and when he

answered a gruff voice said, "This is Mr. W. M. Dougherty speaking."

"Good morning," said Mr. Richardson.

"I guess you know who I am."

"Yes," said Mr. Richardson.

"I'd like to have a talk with you."

"Yes."

"Could you come into my office this morning about eleven-thirty?"

"I'm very busy about that time. Could you make it the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*?"

There was a little silence and a cough and then the gruff voice said, "It's a private matter I wanted to discuss. I think we'd better discuss it in my office."

For a second, Mr. Richardson in his turn was silent. Then he said, "All right. I'll arrange it ... at eleven-thirty."

When he had hung up the receiver he went into the cubbyhole and again sent the stenographer out for air. When she had gone, he said to Mrs. McLeod, "They've found out."

"Who?"

"Dougherty and his mob. He just telephoned asking me to come over and see him."

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"He'll try to bully you."

"Yes, I know that. But I might get some information we could use."

Then Mrs. McLeod looked at him anxiously. "They may try to beat you up."

He laughed, and there was a hint of actual excitement in his voice. “Don’t worry about that. If they try anything I’ll run like hell.”

She looked disappointed, and he said with a grin, “My parole isn’t up for ten days yet. I’m not going to give them any excuse to clap me back in jail on some trumped-up charge of assault.”

“I see. I guess you’re right. You seem to know a lot about those things.”

“I do,” said Mr. Richardson.

And then Mrs. McLeod noticed an odd thing—that the veins in Mr. Richardson’s temples and in his throat were swollen and throbbing. She noticed too that while he was talking with her he had broken a heavy copy pencil clearly in two with one muscular hand. It surprised her. She hadn’t thought of him as a passionate man.

## 40

They hadn’t, it seemed, meant to bully him. When he arrived at the office of W. M. Dougherty and Son, Contractors, a secretary took him straight into Old Dougherty’s office. There were three men there—a short, fat, smooth little man with pink cheeks and shiny eyeglasses, a lean, hollow-cheeked, rather gray man with a stoop, and a heavy, partly bald man with the look of a retired all-in wrestler. The last, Mr. Richardson divined at once, was Old Dougherty. The second was the editor of the *News* whom he already knew by sight, and the first, Old Dougherty said, after he had introduced himself and the lean, gray man, was Mr. Hirsh, the business manager of the *Daily News*.



Mr. Richardson bowed and then a door opened and Jimmy Dougherty came in. The old man introduced his son and Jimmy and Mr. Richardson shook hands. In the gesture there was something of hostility, something of suspicion and something of wariness.

They all sat down and Old Dougherty said, "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks," said Mr. Richardson. He took the cigar and lighted it, and while he was thus engaged, nobody spoke at all. They simply sat watching him as if the mere lighting of a cigar were some fascinating trick of sleight of hand. Mr. Richardson seemed completely unmoved by the scrutiny.

At last Old Dougherty himself broke the silence. He said, "We've been talking about the job you've been doing with the poor old *Daily Shield and Banner*. You've done wonders with the old rag."

"Thank you," said Mr. Richardson.

"Yes, a mighty fine job," said the tall lean man. He spoke nervously as if he wanted to jump off the edge of the chair.

"There's some good new features in it," said the business manager. "I suppose you've had a reaction in the subscriptions?"

"Yes," said Mr. Richardson.

"I should think a pretty big reaction," said the editor.

"Yes," said Mr. Richardson. "Plenty."

There was a moment's awkward silence and then Old Dougherty said, "Well, it's fine to see a grand old paper like the *Daily Shield and Banner* have a come-back."

"That is—if it lasts," said the pink-cheeked Mr. Hirsh. "I always say, it's easy enough to get new circulation. The hard

thing is to keep it.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Richardson.

Jimmy Dougherty didn’t say anything. He simply sat on the opposite side of the mahogany table and stared at Mr. Richardson. There was nothing smooth and friendly in his manner, as there was in the manner of the older men. Now there was just plain hostility and contempt in the blue-eyed stare. He sat on the very edge of the chair as if at any moment he were ready to spring off it and sock Mr. Richardson on the jaw.

Another silence intervened. Each silence became more awkward than the one before. Each silence became a little more demanding. Each silence placed more and more responsibility upon the broad shoulders of Mr. Richardson. The shoulders, however, appeared strong enough to bear the burden. All they could get out of him was a quiet “Yes.” He went on, unperturbed, smoking Old Dougherty’s expensive cigar.

It was the *Daily News* man, the editor, who broke down first.

He said, “We’re always interested in promising young men. We’ve been watching your work and think you have a lot of talent.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Richardson, with a shade of irony in his voice.

Then the business manager spoke up, “We’re always on the lookout for new talent.” He took off the shiny pince-nez and began polishing them. “It occurred to us, Mr. Richardson, that you might want a new job.... I mean a good, well-paid job.”

“What sort of job?”

This time Old Dougherty spoke up, “Well, I think we might as well be frank with you, young fellow. Mr. Winterbottom, here, the editor, would like to retire year after next. We’ve been thinking that we might take you on the *News* as associate editor and then, by the time Mr. Winterbottom retired, you’d be broken in and could take his place.” He looked expectantly at Mr. Richardson, as if he had counted upon his accepting an offer so magnificent with enthusiasm, but the face of the visitor was quite blank of all expression. Apparently he was thinking.

“It’s a very fine opportunity,” said the business manager, “especially for a young fellow who’s unknown—who’s just out ...” Then he halted, awkwardly, and Mr. Richardson finished for him.

“Just out of jail,” he said.

“Well, I hadn’t meant to say exactly that.”

“You might add that I was thrown into jail simply because I arrived in Plattsville without a job.” It was the first time any emotion of any kind had entered Mr. Richardson’s voice, and now it was not a friendly, pleasant emotion, but rather upsetting. The voice was hard as flint and cold as ice. Jimmy Dougherty still stared at him in silent hostility.

“What is your reaction?” asked the *News* man.

“No,” said Mr. Richardson.

“I don’t think you should be hasty in your judgment. It’s a fine opportunity and excellent pay. I may say a good deal more than most men earn for such a job. You see, the *News* is the top paper in this part of the State and we want to keep it

so. You'd better think it over. We don't demand an answer right now. You could think it over and let us know."

"It wouldn't be necessary," said Mr. Richardson, "the answer would still be 'No.' "

Old Dougherty answered him, "I suppose you realize," he said, "that the *Daily Shield and Banner* is actually bankrupt—if the creditors saw fit they could throw Mrs. McLeod into the bankruptcy court tomorrow."

"Yes, I understand the financial situation. I've gone into it thoroughly. I think if we keep on as we're going we may pull out of it all right."

"And you still want to stay with the *Daily Shield and Banner*?"

"Yes."

"May we ask why?" asked Mr. Hirsh.

"Because I like my job."

"I suppose money doesn't mean anything."

"Sure, it means something ... only I'm not worried about that."

Then suddenly Jimmy Dougherty stopped staring and spoke up. There was rage in his voice, "Who in hell are you, anyway? And what are you doing here? Who sent you?"

Mr. Richardson grinned, "I'm a newspaperman. I'm trying to put the *Daily Shield and Banner* on its feet. And nobody sent me. I just came."

Then Old Dougherty, afraid that Jimmy in his anger might give the show away, said in a smooth voice, "You'd better think it over, Mr. Richardson. We don't want to hurry you. Think it over, and if you change your mind give us the answer later."

“I can do that right now. The answer is ‘No.’ ”

“You seem very sure about it,” said Mr. Hirsh smoothly.

“I am.”

A change came into Old Dougherty’s manner. The suaveness went out of it, and the timbre took on an edge of hardness. “Then you’re going to fight us?” He glared at Mr. Richardson, but Mr. Richardson wasn’t to be caught.

He said, “I don’t know that I’d call it fighting you. The *Daily Shield and Banner* has to make its way. I don’t see that it means a fight. There’s room for three papers in this town and the *Chronicle* doesn’t really count.” He rose and picked up his hat. “There doesn’t seem to be anything more to be said. I thank you, gentlemen, for the offer but I’m just not interested.”

Mr. Hirsh smiled sardonically behind the shiny glasses, “There’s only one more thing to be said. When you’re in the gutter again, Mr. Richardson, you’d better not come to the *News* to look for a job.”

“Not a chance,” said Mr. Richardson. “Good morning, gentlemen.” And without another word he turned and went out.

When he had gone the four men sat for a moment in silence. Then Old Dougherty said, “That’s what I call a smooth proposition.”

The bald, nervous editor said, “There’s certainly something fishy about him.”

Old Dougherty put his feet on the floor and swung around in his swivel chair. “Well, boys, I guess there’s nothing left to do but clean up the *Daily Shield and Banner*. I hate to throw

old Mrs. McLeod into the street but it's the only thing to be done."

"She's asking for it," said Mr. Hirsh from behind his shiny glasses.

Jimmy didn't say anything. He rose, and without a word left the room.

## 41

Late the same afternoon the typist finished her job on The Book and left the huge heap of typescript in triplicate piled high on Mrs. McLeod's desk. She left a bill too for fifty-six dollars which took the edge off Mrs. McLeod's pleasure at the sight of the job. She didn't know how she was going to pay it, but when Mr. Richardson came in, he took it up and simply said, "I'll see that this goes through. I'll take it up with Myrtle."

"But Myrtle hasn't got any money. We can't use the subscription money for that with all the other things that have to be paid."

"You leave it to me," he said. He had, Mrs. McLeod noticed, been growing more and more masterful of late, and she liked masterful men. She liked men who said, "Leave it to me." For thirty years she had been waiting for someone to say that to her and it had never been said since J. E. died until now.

Then he said, "I'm going to take home a copy to read. I've only read the first two chapters."

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. McLeod, "it's not much good. It's too long and boring."

“We may have to cut it a bit for publication,” said Mr. Richardson, “but it’s just what we want.”

As he was about to leave she said timidly, “I’m scared about Old Dougherty and his gang. They might do anything.”

“I’m not afraid of that. I’m lying low until the third.”

“And it isn’t only that,” said Mrs. McLeod. “There’s the question of Jane.”

He looked puzzled, “What question?”

“Jane and Jimmy.”

“What does that mean?”

“He was her beau. I guess he still is.”

She regarded Mr. Richardson for a moment in silence, as if speculating as to how much she dared tell him. Then she said, “I guess you’re really one of us so that I can tell you.” She looked shy and then said, “You see, Jane’s really in love with him. She tries to pretend even to herself that she isn’t, but she is. I know all the signs in a woman. That’s one thing that doesn’t change with the times.” Again she hesitated, and after a second she said timidly, “Sometimes I think I ought to give up the whole idea of the crusade if it means breaking up everything between them. You see, when I first had the idea I didn’t realize how serious it was between them.” She smiled shyly, “Don’t think I’m soft and silly ... but people being in love always frightens me. There’s something wonderful about it ... and touching.”

While she was speaking Mr. Richardson’s grave young face grew more and more serious. When she had finished he waited a moment to see whether the halting speech would continue. Then he said, “I understand what you mean, only I’m afraid it can’t very well be stopped now ... all we’ve done

and all the promises we've made ... not after I've been to see Bill Swain. And besides, the others mean to fight us, anyway. They said as much this morning. They made all sorts of threats."

"What kind of threats?"

"About putting us into bankruptcy. I don't suppose they'd stop at anything."

"Was Jimmy there?" asked Mrs. McLeod with unexpected shrewdness.

"Yes, he was."

"Did he make threats?"

"No, he didn't. He just glared at me. He acted as if he hated me more than any of the others."

Mrs. McLeod made a clucking sound, "That was on account of Jane."

Mr. Richardson took up his hat. He said, "Well, I must say I wish I'd known all this sooner. I'd have stayed in jail and gone on with my job there."

"You mustn't take it like that." Then after a second or two, she sighed and said, "I guess we'll have to go through with it. I don't know why everything is always so difficult."

"Maybe you'd better put it up to Jane. But I don't see how even that is going to get us anywhere. It's too late now."

"Why don't you speak to her? She's impressed by you."

He laughed. "Not as much as you think, I'm afraid." Then he made a whistling sound with his lips. "My God!" he said, "I've just thought of something."

"What?"



“I told her about him being thrown out of the El Dorado. I told her everything—about his being drunk and out with that tart—everything—about his sending his love. I thought she’d think it was a good joke. I hadn’t any idea. Now I see why she acted like that at the movies.”

So he had done it for her. He told her everything. “Maybe,” said Mrs. McLeod, “that’ll fix it. Maybe that’ll be enough to do the trick.”

“I doubt it,” said Mr. Richardson.

## 42

It hadn’t fixed it. The information had only made Jane miserable and filled her with doubts ... doubt upon doubt about everything. If Jimmy behaved like that it was better, she told herself, to know it now before it was too late. If that was the kind of man he was, he’d only make her miserable as a husband. She no longer pretended now, she knew that she loved him enough to want to marry him in spite of everything. But what if he had drunk too much and gone out with Fern to the El Dorado because he was miserable and unhappy over their quarrel? What if he felt things as deeply as that? Then she would have lost everything by chucking him. But how, she asked herself, was she to know? And Mr. Richardson? Why had he told her? Was it because he guessed how she felt about Jimmy and told her on purpose to kill her feeling? Was he as bad as that? Was that why he had tried to hold her hand afterward in the darkness of the Palace Theatre? Was he falling in love with her or just trying to make her? But in spite of her wanting to believe that was the reason, she couldn’t really believe it. In spite of his puzzling detachment and his persistent blindness to her charms, in

spite even of her vacillating dislike for him, she knew he wasn't like that. He might be a Yankee and cold-blooded but there wasn't a hint of anything mean in him.

So she was thoroughly miserable, so miserable that even the excitement of new work made it all no better. She could have solved everything by going to Jimmy and having a talk with him, but that was no more in her nature than it was in Jimmy's. It was pride that kept them both mute, the harsh, bitter, foolish, defeating pride of youth, which with years and experience softens and melts and fades away. How could she, a McLeod, risk humiliation at the hands of a Dougherty? What if, when she went to him, he said he had gotten drunk and gone out with Fern because he wanted to, because he was fed up with her and her kind of respectable girl? What if he said he never wanted to see her again? No, such things were not to be risked, even if for the rest of her life she ate her heart out for him.

So she went on tormenting herself with miserable doubts. She made decisions and immediately unmade them. And at last, because she could find no other way to at least the shadow of peace, she told herself that she would let the annual barbecue and home-coming decide it. If he sent word that he wanted her to go with him, if he was fine enough to overlook her meanness, she would humble her pride and pretend that there had never been any quarrel. There were moments when she felt willing even to desert Aunt Vinnie and abandon the crusade. If he did not ask her again, then she was finished with him.

That night when she returned to McLeod's Folly she had a glass of milk and a piece of Aida's coconut cake in the kitchen and went to bed early so that she would not have to

see either Aunt Vinnie or Mr. Richardson. On the hall table there was as usual the letter with the Boston postmark. She took it up and examined it curiously. Mr. Richardson, it seemed, received letters from only one person in all the world. Try as she would she couldn't make out for certain whether the handwriting was that of a man or a woman. The writing paper was thinnish and looked expensive. As she held it under the light she discovered that the inner lining of the envelope had been by some chance folded back so that you were able with some effort to read a few words through the thin paper. For a second she listened to make certain there was no one near her in the big house. Then cautiously she held it just beneath the light and was able to make out four or five words. "Dear Jack, I haven't heard ..." and the rest was covered by the opaque lining paper.

For a moment she had wild ideas of steaming open the letter and reading it. For a moment she even thought, "If he's deceiving us, I've a right to know the truth."

Dear Jack ... and he said his name was Thomas.

Then quickly, as if the letter burned her fingers, she threw it on the hall table and ran up the stairs. A McLeod, even at a pinch, couldn't do things like that.

But it made Mr. Richardson seem more mysterious and interesting than ever.

Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson had supper together, and afterward Mrs. McLeod went off to have a conference with Gashouse Mary, leaving him to spend the evening in the library working at his book on labor conditions.

Left alone, he had intended to read two or three chapters of The Book and then go to work, but the evening did not work out in this fashion. In one of J. E.'s huge, worn leather chairs

he seated himself with the typescript, a pipe and a whisky and soda. When he had finished two chapters his hands, despite his will, took a third chapter off the table beside him, and when that was finished a fourth and then a fifth and then another. After a long time, when at last he glanced at his watch, it was already a quarter past eleven. For a moment he sat still and thoughtful, and then, abandoning his work altogether for the evening, he went on reading.

At a little before midnight the house door opened and after a moment there was the sound of Mrs. McLeod's footsteps as she climbed the huge stairway. Then there was only silence in the big house, and Mr. Richardson took up the typescript again. He read and read, chapter after chapter, until, feeling stiff and a little chilled, he rose and stretched himself and looked at his watch. It was half-past two and there were still four more chapters to be read.

After pouring another drink, he seated himself again and went on reading. It was a quarter past four in the morning when he finished at last the huge pile of typescript. With a feeling of awe he put down the last page, turned out the light and went to bed.

## 43

He did not appear at breakfast the next morning, not this time because he had already eaten and gone to the office, but because he had been guilty of Jane's lazy trick. Wakened at seven-thirty by the alarm clock, he had turned it off, rolled over and gone back to sleep. And Aida did not waken him because she thought he worked very hard and should be given a chance to lie in bed late now and then. It was ten o'clock when she climbed the stairs with a tray of hot waffles

and coffee and bacon and eggs. It was the first time since J. E. McLeod died that anyone in McLeod's Folly had had breakfast in bed, but Aida was fond of Mr. Richardson. He had become her pet.

Meanwhile, as Mrs. McLeod and Jane walked to the office, Mrs. McLeod screwed up her courage and presently, at the very last moment when they were actually crossing the Square, she managed to say, "Dear, there's something I've got to ask you."

Jane looked suspicious and even hostile. "What?" she asked abruptly.

"It's about Jimmy Dougherty. Will the crusade mean anything to your affairs?" She couldn't think how to put the question discreetly, and now she knew she had bungled it.

Craftily Jane asked, "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean if you don't want to have a campaign in the paper against his father ... we might still be able to call it off."

"I don't see why it should make any difference to me."

"I thought you were fond of him ... that's all."

"I haven't spoken to him for weeks."

They were crossing the street now, almost at the door of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. Jane said suddenly, "And I wish you wouldn't mention him to me again. I'm sick of it ... everybody throwing him up to me—you and Willie and Aida and even Mr. Richardson."

"I never mentioned his name before," said Mrs. McLeod.

"Well, you might just as well. You're always thinking about him and me. And I don't give a damn what happens to him."

Then it was all right. Jane said she didn't care, but she wished that Jane hadn't been so violent about not caring.

## 44

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mr. Richardson appeared in the office and it was Willie, refreshed from the Bourbon bottle, who greeted him. There was a ring of satisfaction in his voice at having found a sinner like himself in the great and perfect, the punctual and efficient Mr. Richardson.

"Well," he said. "Had a late night, last night?"

"Yes," said Mr. Richardson, "I overslept."

Mr. Richardson went straight to the cubbyhole and faced Mrs. McLeod as ashamed as any schoolboy. "I don't know what happened to me except I stayed up late reading your book."

"You deserve a good sleep now and then."

Instead of going away at once he sat down. His face became very serious and he said, "Mrs. McLeod, I must talk to you about that book."

For a moment she thought he meant to scold her and timidly she said, "I hope it's all right."

"It's all right, Mrs. McLeod. It's swell. It's just what we want for the paper. It'll bring in a lot of new subscriptions." He took off his glasses, always a sign of great seriousness, and continued, "But it isn't that. Something ought to be done about that book. Books like that aren't lying around waiting to be picked up."

"What do you mean?"

“I mean you ought to find a publisher for it. I mean that it’s no ordinary book. It’s a great book. It’s the kind of book all America is waiting for.”

“I never thought of finding a publisher. I wouldn’t know how to go about it.”

He said, “Will you leave that to me?”

“You’ve got so much to do already.”

“I’ve got a friend in New York who’s an agent. I’ll send it to him and he can take care of the whole thing.”

Suddenly she began to cry. The tears came in spite of anything she could do to stop them, rolling idiotically down her worn, wrinkled face. They were tears of relief and delight, of weariness and relaxation. She was a woman who was meant by God to be cherished and protected and looked after, and since the death of J. E. nobody had ever cherished her or taken the least trouble; instead they had come to her with all their troubles.

In a shamed and choking voice she said, “I don’t know why you take so much trouble about me.”

The tears made Mr. Richardson uncomfortable. He was stirring in his chair as if he had what Aida called “a misery.”

“You’ve been pretty good to me, too,” he said. Then, rising, he put one hand on her thin shoulder and said, “You leave it to me. I’ll send it off today,” and left her alone to have a good cry.

## 45

All that week and next, new subscribers added their names to the swelling list, and belowstairs Myrtle Ferguson, in her cage, recorded them, cashed the checks and put the cash into

the old-fashioned till. With each new subscription a little more of the defeated sourness seemed to drain away from Myrtle. To Mrs. McLeod the change seemed nothing short of miraculous. The very lines, worn into Myrtle's face by years of disappointment, boredom and defeat, seemed to soften and melt away. The old high collars and jabots disappeared completely and she took to wearing turquoise earrings, and then one morning Myrtle appeared, to the astonishment of the whole office, with her hair cut short and a permanent wave which was still in the first stage and made her look more like a Zulu queen than the cashier of the sober *Daily Shield and Banner*.

Part of the reason for the change in Myrtle came from the transformation in Willie's character. He no longer got thoroughly drunk over the week end, and his Saturday nights he no longer spent at the El Dorado and in Franklin Street pouring his quarters into Bourbon and his nickels into the slots of Mamie Furnoy's and Estelle Laverne's mechanical pianos. He even trimmed his drooping, tobacco-stained mustache and bought a new suit at "Every Day a Bargain" Frendlich's. As to cut there was not much change over his old sagging costumes, but the material was a noisy-checked stuff, to which he added one morning, with a certain self-conscious embarrassment, a red bow tie. To crown all he bought himself a brown derby hat, and after that the rejuvenation was complete, and he felt himself once more the lady-killing Southern gentleman he had been in his youth. On the Saturday night before the crusade began, he took Myrtle to dinner at the Beauregard Hotel and afterward to see *Romeo and Juliet* at the Palace.



It was the gossip column which had turned the trick. It was good and its success was recognized at once in Plattesville. It made him a personage. No longer was he a dreary old man who had to cadge for news; people who liked to see their names in print looked him up and telephoned him to give him items of personal interest. The column, alone, he knew, was responsible for a good many of the new subscribers. His self-respect was restored and it worked magic on his character. In his new checked suit he now entered saloons and poolrooms with a swagger.

And the son of Aida's cousin Athena brought in once a week a page devoted to the births, deaths, parties, fish fries and revival meetings in Darkietown. He was a shy high-yaller boy who wrote poetry. When he showed one or two verses to Mr. Richardson, the managing editor told him they were good and bought two or three pieces to publish in the *Daily Shield and Banner*, paying Athena's son five dollars apiece for the poems right out of his own pocket. And he told the boy to bring him some more and maybe he, Mr. Richardson, could get them published in magazines in the East.

But perhaps the greatest change in the office was experienced by the telephone. For years it had hardly worked at all, and now it rarely stopped ringing from nine in the morning until six at night. The one old-fashioned instrument on the end of the table which held the files, rang so much that at last an official of the telephone company called on Mrs. McLeod and persuaded her to install not one but two more instruments, one in her cubbyhole and one on Mr. Richardson's desk. He was even willing to give her reduced rates because the installation would save an immense amount of work and confusion at the exchange, which was often

forced to make the same call over and over again because the *Daily Shield and Banner* line was always busy.

And then one by one the advertisements began to come in and the revenue to rise and the week before the crusade began, Mrs. McLeod, with the aid of Myrtle and Mr. Richardson, went over the books and found herself solvent for the first time in ten years—not only solvent, but there was money to pay bills and salaries and two dollars and forty-five cents balance on the right side; that is, if one didn't count the thousands of dollars of debts and the mortgages.

There was a good deal of difficulty and arguing on the subject of Mr. Richardson's salary. He insisted that he could only accept thirty dollars a week as an ordinary reporter because she had engaged him as nothing more than that, but she declared in turn that he should be paid twice as much because he was really managing editor and without him the renaissance of the *Daily Shield and Banner* would never have occurred.

He finally said to her, "What kind of a woman are you, anyway? Just as soon as you become solvent you want to throw the paper right back into bankruptcy."

Mrs. McLeod laughed, "And you? First you want to stay in jail and then you don't want to be paid."

In the end he won by saying that when the paper was well on its feet, he would accept what she considered a proper salary. And during the talk both of them pretended that he meant to stay on forever on the *Daily Shield and Banner*.

The conference evidently troubled Mr. Richardson, for late that afternoon he asked Jane to come out with him for a cup of tea at Mrs. Dacey's Old Virginia Tea Shoppe, and there he said to her, "We've got to make plans for when I go away."

Jane, startled, looked at him. "You're not going away now, are you?"

"No, but I'm going away when my job is finished. I've got to go back East one of these days."

She listened to him apathetically as if a part of her mind were elsewhere, so that he had to talk twice as hard as he had meant to in order to put over his points.

Presently he said, "You were enthusiastic in the beginning. What's the matter with you now? What's happened?"

He hoped, perhaps, that she would be frank and tell him about Jimmy Dougherty, but she said nothing about the Doughertys or the crusade. She only said, "There's nothing the matter with me."

He said, "Some day I've got to leave you to carry on. You've got to be managing editor. Maybe, if the paper's doing well and can afford it, I can send you some young fellow with experience from the East. But in the meanwhile I want to teach you everything you ought to know."

She looked at him shrewdly, and then suddenly turned away and said, "I wish you could teach me some common sense."

He laughed. "You seem to have plenty."

"I haven't any at all. If only I had a little that you could spare."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, I wish I could take things as calmly as you do. You never get excited. You never lose your head. You've always got everything under control." Again she looked away from him and then blurted out, "Sometimes I think you must be inhuman."

“Do *you* want to be inhuman?”

“Yes,” she said quickly, “it makes life so much easier.”

Smiling, he said, “The nicest thing about you is that you’re so damned human. You lose your temper one minute and are all smiles the next. One minute you’re bored and the next you’re enthusiastic, and you’re romantic and full of feeling.” He lighted a cigarette and then said, “I wish I could be more like that. Having common sense doesn’t get you anywhere in the long run. It doesn’t get you much fun.”

Suddenly it occurred to her that they were having an intimate talk. They were talking about each other, and it was very pleasant, and Mr. Richardson had never seemed so attractive. But she hated being told she was romantic and full of feeling.

In the next moment he killed it all by saying, “I’m no good at soul-searching. I don’t know how. I hate talking about myself but I can tell you this—that you can’t always tell by the outside what’s going on inside.”

She wanted to ask him what he meant by that, but she didn’t because his mocking remark about “soul-searching” had withered the intimacy at its very source. It made her feel young again and silly. She said, “We’d better go back and take a look at the paper. It must be off the press by now.” And rising, she put out her cigarette and started for the door. But she was aware that he had done something to her. She really liked him for the first time. She had a feeling that she wanted to help him. How, she did not know. How could you help anyone as self-sufficient as Mr. Richardson?

And then as they were walking toward the Square she saw out of the corner of her eye an olive-green roadster stopped in the middle of the street by a traffic light and in it Jimmy

Dougherty. She wanted to call out to him, but dared not risk it. Out of the corner of her eye she saw that he was looking at them, and thought, “Damn it, why is it he always sees me when I’m with Mr. Richardson?”

If she had been alone he might have called out to her. Now he’d think that there was something up between her and the newcomer; and she knew how silly he could be when he was jealous. She thought, “There goes my chance of going to the barbecue. There goes everything. It’s all over. Maybe I’m well out of it.” But she still went on hoping. She hoped up to the very eve of the crusade.

The traffic light changed and the roadster shot forward, grazing a baby carriage, and as they reached the other side of the street, Mr. Richardson said, “Don’t you think we might relax and call each other by our first names? It’s silly going on as Mr. Richardson and Miss Baldwin. May I call you Jane? Everybody calls me Tom. I’d like it if you’d call me that too.”

“I suppose,” said Jane slyly, “Tom is as good a name as any other.”

He looked at her suddenly, sharply, but the expression of her face was perfectly blank and noncommittal.

Then he said, “All right, we’ll be Tom and Jane. It’s much cozier.”

“I didn’t think that coziness mattered much to you.”

He laughed, a little ruefully, “It does matter,” he said. “It matters like hell!”

It was Mr. Richardson who changed the date for the opening salvo. It had been set for the third, the day after his parole was finished, a gesture almost of nose-thumbing which made Mrs. McLeod chuckle. But a week before, he came to her and said, "I've had a better idea."

"Yes, what?"

"Well, the Dougherty-Democratic barbecue is set for the sixth, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, why not open the crusade the evening of the fifth?"

She thought for a moment, "The paper wouldn't reach the county subscribers till the next day."

"We've got most of the county on our side. It's the city that matters."

"Maybe you're right," she said. "You always are." And when she thought it over she saw that it was an excellent idea.

Two days before the barbecue and home-coming, Mr. Richardson announced on the editorial page that the *Daily Shield and Banner*, beginning on the fifth of the month, would begin a new feature—a novel by Lavinia McLeod based on the history of Plattessville. It would be a regular daily feature and of great interest not only to the older generation which shared the memories of Mrs. McLeod, but to the younger one which knew nothing of the rigor, the hardship, the color and the glories of the old life. The announcement was shrewdly worded; it was calculated to throw a little of the fear of God into the *Daily News* and the Dougherty gang, to give them suspicions without facts of

what was to follow, but nothing definite enough to work upon.

All the day of the fifth the *Daily Shield and Banner* office vibrated with suppressed excitement. It wasn't any longer possible to keep the crusade a secret. Alf Lyman on the linotype made the keys jump and stutter with his astonishment over the copy he was setting. Old Zimmerman twice swallowed tobacco juice in his excitement over the headlines he was ordered to set up. Belowstairs, Myrtle jittered and shook her turquoise earrings and looked secretive when people came to her cage to pay in money. Willie had an extra drink or two out of the bottom drawer to steady him and keep up his courage, and in the middle of the afternoon, he said to Mrs. McLeod, "All hell is gonna break loose in this cow town, Vinnie."

As for Mrs. McLeod herself, her heart thumped all day with a mixture of excitement and perturbation. She had never in her life attacked anyone and now she was attacking the most powerful gang Plattesville had ever known. It terrified her and made her ashamed, as if in some way she had committed a crime and might be arrested.

Only Mr. Richardson went about his work calmly and deliberately, as if nothing unusual was happening, and only Jane noticed the look in the gray-blue eyes, a look of excitement, almost of fire, and remembered suddenly what he had said in the tearoom, "You can't always tell by the outside what's going on inside." As the day wore on she found herself watching him fascinated, wondering how he could care so profoundly about something which was happening in a town he had never seen until a little more than two months earlier. She had no talent for abstract things and she could

neither divine, nor have believed if she had been capable of divining it, how much Mr. Richardson cared about Good and Evil.

The sight of him gave a little lift to a day which for her was not exciting but grew more and more dreary as the hope of hearing from Jimmy slowly died. In her heart she knew now that he would look upon the crusade as a blow at himself, no matter how much the attack made by the paper was directed at his father, and he would see it as a plot concocted by herself and Mr. Richardson. It was too late to do anything now, even if Aunt Vinnie and Mr. Richardson were willing to call everything off at the last minute. Nevertheless, at five o'clock there was still a faint pale ghost of hope in her heart that Jimmy would call her up and say he expected her to go to the barbecue with him.

But at five-fifteen, when Myrtle appeared from belowstairs bearing triumphantly the first damp copies of the first crusade number, Jane's heart was hardened. He hadn't sent her any word: so, she told herself, it meant that he was finished with her. He had never really cared for her at all, and he had no desire to make it up. She had been deceiving herself all along; she had made herself believe that they loved each other, but she had been a fool. The sight of the newspapers, still damp with printers' ink and carried at arm's length by Myrtle, so as not to soil her shirtwaist, seemed to her suddenly a kind of symbol. It was finished, and here in the *Daily Shield and Banner* was Mr. Richardson's attack on Old Dougherty. That, at least, was final. The newsboys by now were on the street. The crusade had opened. And everything was finished between her and Jimmy. There was something terrible in the sight of the damp print.



Stiffening her lip, she went over with the rest of them—Aunt Vinnie and Mr. Richardson, Myrtle and Willie Ferguson and old Zimmerman to examine the *Daily Shield and Banner*.

The ordinary news had for them no interest. It was the editorial page and the page opposite.

At the top of the editorial page appeared a streamer headline, reading: “What are the citizens of Plattesville going to do about it?” and just beneath it Mr. Richardson’s editorial began. It opened with a general statement of the situation, calling attention to the fact that because the citizens of Plattesville had done nothing about their government, it had steadily grown worse and worse until it had become a stench in the nostrils and a disgrace to the whole Southwest. The *Daily Shield and Banner*, continued the editorial, had been conducting an investigation, and it meant to bring to light in a series of articles all the corruption which had been imposed on the taxpayers of one of the finest cities in the whole of the United States. The *Daily Shield and Banner* called upon the honest citizens of Plattesville to organize and fight. The newspaper would give them every possible aid. What was needed was a new and independent Democratic organization.

Beneath the opening salvo appeared a series of paragraphs each with a subhead. They read: “What About the Graft on Prison Labor—The New Courthouse Roof—The Hillyard Street-Lighting System—The New Water Works—The West Side Sewage Deal—Franklin Street?”

On the page opposite appeared the opening installment of Lavinia McLeod’s novel called “The Good Old Days.” It looked handsome and imposing, and all the time Mrs. McLeod was engaged in reading the opening crusade article, her eye, despite anything she could do, kept wandering to the

page opposite for a glance at the name LAVINIA McLEOD set in bold type at the top of the page. At last she was an author. For a moment, selfishly, she thought, that fact was more important to her than the crusade.

The taciturn old Zimmerman suddenly grinned and said with a smack of tobacco-stained lips, "Well, I guess that'll fix 'em."

It was Willie Ferguson who answered him.

"It ain't over yet. The fightin's only begun and Plattessville always raised the fightinest set of bastards in the whole Southwest."

In Mrs. McLeod's eyes there was a look of wonder as she regarded Mr. Richardson. He didn't seem to be impressed or even excited but was peering at the page through his steel-rimmed spectacles. Jane was watching him too, admiring but hating him at the same time because he was so clever and so efficient.

Mrs. McLeod, in a weak voice, asked, "How did you find all this stuff, all the details, I mean?"

Mr. Richardson looked up as if surprised, and said, "Well, you told me a lot and Gashouse Mary told me plenty more, and the State boss had a couple of men on the job I didn't even tell you about. And I've heard plenty just nosing about on my own. All I had to do was check and organize the stuff."

Then the door opened and a messenger boy came in. They all turned toward him expectantly as if the telegram he carried were the first result of the crusade. He looked at them all and said, "Miss Jane Baldwin?"

"It's for me," said Jane and signed for it.

In turn, the others transferred their interest from the departing messenger boy to Jane. As she opened the telegram her hand trembled. She read it through while they all watched her. Then to turn their eyes away from her she said, in an odd choking voice, "It's nothing," and crumpled the telegram in her hand. All but Mrs. McLeod turned back again to the newspaper. She watched Jane take up her hat and start for the door.

She wanted to be sympathetic. She followed her out of the door and said, "Not bad news?"

"No," said Jane. And as she passed her, she said, "Please leave me alone, I have to go out." And then Mrs. McLeod knew that the telegram was from Jimmy Dougherty.

## 47

Her face wet with tears, Jane ran down the stairs and across the Square. She had reached the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Fountain before she stopped running and seated herself on a bench. The crumpled telegram was still in her hand, and after a moment she opened it and read it again. It said simply, "I didn't want to, but I had to give in. Will you make it up and go to the barbecue with me? Love. Jimmy."

At the moment she did not know what she felt. She thought, "He can't have seen the paper yet," and then with a catch of hope, she thought, "Maybe he has seen it and wants to tell me he doesn't mind." Then she looked down at the telegram and the address of the sender and she felt suddenly sick. It hadn't been sent from the office in the Dougherty Block. It was sent from Millersville, and at once she knew that of course he wouldn't be at the office but at Millersville making arrangements for the barbecue. And so he didn't

know yet ... he couldn't know because he couldn't have seen the paper. He couldn't know of the dreadful attack....

Near by, through her misery she heard a newsboy shouting, "*Daily Shield and Banner!* Special edition! Read the Big Graft Exposay!"

A little later she rose and walked to the other side of the Square to the telegraph office. There in a kind of nightmare she wrote out a telegram:

"Everything is made up but it is too late now."

The telegraph form was stained with tears and she thought, "If only he saw them he'd understand," but you couldn't send tear stains by telegram.

## 48

At the same time at the office of the *Daily News*, behind locked doors, a conference was taking place. Mr. Hirsh, the business manager, the thin worried editor, and Old Dougherty sat round the heavy mahogany table of Mr. Hirsh's office. On the table lay two copies, still damp, of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. Behind his shiny glasses Mr. Hirsh's pink face wore an expression like that of an alarmed guinea pig. The face of the thin and bilious editor, Mr. Winterbottom, was corrugated by wrinkles, and on the tough brow of Old Dougherty there were beads of sweat which he kept wiping away with a huge white handkerchief.

Hirsh said, "Well, they've pulled a fast one—springing it now before we were ready for them."

The editor, in a mild voice, said, "If you remember, Mr. Dougherty, I told you some time ago that you were headed for trouble."

Dougherty sweated, “A hell of a lot of good that does me now. What we’ve got to do is shut them up before it’s too late.” Mr. Hirsh, in a mild voice, said, “When is that bastard’s parole up?”

Dougherty said, “We can’t do anything there. It was up five days ago. We’ve got to bring the creditors down on them and snuff out the lousy sheet.”

“That takes a lot of time. They can get in a lot of dirty work before we can shut ’em down. I wanted to set the wheels moving last week but you wouldn’t let me.”

“There was a reason,” said Old Dougherty.

“What?” asked the worried editor.

“Jimmy didn’t want to do it.”

“Why not?” asked Mr. Hirsh.

Old Dougherty coughed nervously as if ashamed of being sentimental, “Well, the truth is, the boy has been kind of off his feed on account of that Baldwin girl—old Mrs. McLeod’s niece.”

The thin editor said, “Well, it’s going to cost us plenty now.”

The alarmed guinea-pig look went out of Mr. Hirsh’s face and in its place came the expression of a shrewd rat. “It ain’t as bad as you think,” he said, “I’ve got a little dirty work on my own. I’ve sent a letter or two and I checked up on the mortgages on the paper itself and the old woman’s house. It isn’t going to take as much time as you thought.”

Suddenly Old Dougherty exploded, “What the hell did you do that for against my orders? I’m boss around here and don’t forget it.”

Oddly enough, although the lines in the face of the nervous editor became anguished and taut, the face of Mr. Hirsh, the guinea pig, didn't seem very frightened, perhaps because in a long and unsavory career he had dealt too many times with men like Old Dougherty. After all, he had been engaged to work on the *News* because he knew a thing or two.

Quietly he said, "Maybe you'd rather go to the State Penitentiary than smash a lousy old sheet like the *Daily Shield and Banner*?"

"Who's going to the penitentiary? They haven't got anything on me."

But Mr. Hirsh was persistent. Quietly, laying his finger on the *Daily Shield and Banner*, he said, "Have you read that carefully? Don't imagine they've shot all the ammunition they've got just trying to find the range."

Old Dougherty began to bluster. "Listen, Hirsh," he said, "I've been in this town longer than you. I know the politics of the place. They haven't got a thing on me."

Mr. Hirsh very quietly folded up his copy of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. "Okay. But you'd better take my advice. Think it over and let me know later tonight. But don't forget that there are other guys besides yourself who can do a little framing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't suppose you're the only man with a little influence in State politics."

Old Dougherty snorted. Then he said, "That goddamned picnic is tomorrow!" He smacked his thigh, and a gleam of something like admiration came into his eye. "That bastard Richardson," he said, "is pretty smart—choosing the night

before the barbecue to unload his garbage! We ought to have offered him a couple of thousand a month to come over to us. It woulda been worth it.”

Mr. Hirsh said, “He wouldn’t have come if you’d offered him a coupla million a month.”

“Why not?” asked Old Dougherty.

“Because he’s that kind of guy. I’ve seen ’em before. Only once or twice—but they’re tough ... about the toughest thing there is. They can’t be bought. They’re crazy—that kind. Money don’t interest ’em.”

## 49

When W. M. Dougherty finally left the office of the *Daily News* for his own house, Mr. Hirsh, the business manager of the *Daily News*, and Mr. Winterbottom, the managing editor, continued the conference over beer and sandwiches.

For Mr. Hirsh, the job on the *Daily News* represented merely a phase of time marking. To him the *News*, even Plattsville and its politics were smalltime stuff. The job served several purposes. Disguised as Mr. Hirsh in a more or less remote part of the Southwest, it made him comparatively safe from pursuit by the officers of the law who had made it uncomfortable for him to remain in Illinois or Indiana. It would, until the charges against him could be fixed, remain extremely uncomfortable for him to return to these States for several more years, and beyond that the Federal government had several questions it wanted to ask of Mr. Hirsh.

Old Dougherty knew about the charges. As a matter of record, he and Mr. Hirsh were, if not old friends, old acquaintances. Mr. Hirsh’s name was not Hirsh but

Sulzberger, and the two of them had met long ago at a Democratic National Convention. As a business manager, Mr. Hirsh was not brilliant, but he had other qualities which to W. M. Dougherty were valuable. He knew everything about dirty politics; he was experienced in strong-arm methods, and he could, if necessary, summon a troop of gunmen at a moment's notice. It was Mr. Hirsh's mugs who had twice wrecked Gashouse Mary's El Dorado when Mary objected to paying tribute to the Dougherty gang.

Mr. Hirsh did not in the least resemble his reputation with his pink cheeks and shiny pince-nez, his girlish mouth and his immaculate pudgy little hands; he was more like a fussy, middle-aged bachelor Sunday-school teacher than a killer, but he liked pulling the legs off flies, and only the janitor of the *Daily News* office knew that he was responsible for the fire which six months earlier had wrecked the room where the newsprint paper was kept. Mr. Hirsh had, it seemed, one night poured gasoline over a live rat in one of the janitor's traps and turned it loose after putting a match to it. The rat immediately took refuge in the room where the paper was stored. The knowledge of this fact had caused two rises in the salary of the janitor since the incident, rises of which no one save Mr. Hirsh knew anything at all.

As for Mr. Winterbottom, the editor, he was a tired and discouraged man. For thirty-seven years he had labored as a newspaperman in middle-sized towns in the Southwest, and now at fifty-five he was making thirty-five hundred dollars a year with which to support his harassed and nagging wife and four of the seven children who still remained beneath his roof. And although he had the title of managing editor, he managed nothing whatever; so far as prestige or authority



was concerned, he might just as well have been the janitor. If, as rarely occurred, he was permitted to write an editorial, the range of his writing was confined to the weather or the county fair or some other innocuous subject upon which it was impossible to be indiscreet. For Old Dougherty thought him a fool, and had no use for him save to translate into passable English the ungrammatical, misspelled editorials which he himself wrote out each night in the library of the big Tudor house.

Unlike Mr. Hirsh, Mr. Winterbottom looked exactly what he was. He had a foolish, discouraged sheep face and a lanky body which appeared to be all angles and joints. He was as untidy as a trollop's washstand, and he wore black sleeve guards to save laundry bills. Twice in his thirty years of marriage he had begotten twins by his ill-natured wife. Behind the exterior, which was like an unpainted house on the wrong side of the railway tracks, Mr. Winterbottom was a mass of grudges. He had a number of large vague grudges against fate and life, and he had grudges against his wife and what, in the wisdom of advancing age, now appeared to him to be his unnecessary children. He had grudges against Old Dougherty and against Jimmy for being young and good looking and for enjoying all the forbidden fruits which his Methodism had prevented him from enjoying at Jimmy's age. And most of all he had a grudge against Mr. Hirsh. Mr. Hirsh was not only a newcomer, but he had a great deal of authority in the *News* office and in the Dougherty machine. In his nasty way, he lorded it over the other members of the *News* staff. There were even times, Mr. Winterbottom told his wife, when you'd have thought old W. M. was afraid of Mr. Hirsh. He hated Mr. Hirsh.

Mr. Hirsh did not hate Mr. Winterbottom. He simply held him in contempt.

So while the two of them sat over their sandwiches and beer, there was not much conversation. The conference, both of them knew, was a mockery, and Mr. Hirsh was making no effort to pretend that it was anything else, an attitude which did nothing toward appeasing Mr. Winterbottom. But if they did not speak, they both did a lot of thinking.

On his side of the copy desk, Mr. Hirsh was thinking, "The old man is going to get into plenty of trouble if he don't watch his step. The trouble is that he's a smalltime politician. He ain't up-to-date ... and the situation is just right for Swain to take him for a ride."

He didn't know exactly how deep and complicated the old man's trickery and dishonesty had been, but he divined that it was probably a good deal worse than W. M. had ever let him or anyone else know. And the old man was tired too. It wasn't as if he was ready for a fight. And letting this affair between his son and that Baldwin girl count for anything! In crooked politics you had to be ruthless even if it meant doing in your own mother. Girl or no girl, the *Daily Shield and Banner* would have to be smashed before it was too late, and that fresh guy Richardson would have to be fixed too, one way or another.

Mr. Hirsh raised the glass of beer to his rosebud lips, and when he put the glass down again he smacked his lips, not in satisfaction over the beer but over the prospect of fixing Mr. Richardson. He didn't care for Mr. Richardson. He hadn't liked his manner the day he came to Old Dougherty's office ... too cocky, too fresh for a guy of his age. And he didn't like Mr. Richardson because Mr. Richardson was normal and

healthy. Mr. Hirsh didn't like anybody who was healthy, but he specially disliked Mr. Richardson's square jaw and gray-blue eyes. And old W. M. didn't appreciate how dangerous a guy like that could be. There was no stopping that kind of guy once they got started.

"It was the same kind of district attorney that chased me out of Indiana," he thought. "If somebody had bumped him off, I wouldn't be hidin' away out here in this cow town."

No, Mr. Richardson would certainly have to be "fixed" if he went on with this campaign. Why, he might even get nosy about Mr. Hirsh and make life very uncomfortable for him. In the meanwhile they could get to work making trouble about mortgages and advertising and things like that. Mr. Hirsh could send for a couple of the boys to come down and do a job. Bill the Gyp, and Little Hermie, he thought, would be the best pair. They worked all right together and they both looked respectable. They could dress up to look like Rotary Club members and nobody would notice them in a place like Plattesville.

"I'll write tonight when I get home," thought Mr. Hirsh.

He wasn't a big clumsy spider like Old Dougherty. He was small and plausible, and, looking like a pansy Sunday-school teacher, all the more deadly.

Opposite him Mr. Winterbottom sat, peering fretfully from under his shaggy eyebrows. He had indigestion already from swallowing bits of hamburger sandwiches whole and he was thinking spitefully, "If he don't look out, the old man is goin' to get caught this time. They can get plenty on him—plenty. And this guy Hirsh. Who is he, anyway? Where'd he come from? What was he before? Maybe they'll get him too."

And in Mr. Winterbottom's narrow head ideas began to hatch. He thought, "I know enough myself to send old W. M. to jail. All I need to do is to open my trap about half a dozen little deals that aren't so pretty. I got all the facts too. That'd pay him back for treatin' me like an office boy all these years. I could fix him." And for a long time he sat there, a sandwich poised in his hand, staring out of the window into the Square, imagining the whole story of Old Dougherty's defeat and humiliation. He saw himself testifying on the witness stand. He saw Old Dougherty coming to him, pleading with him, attempting to bribe him to keep quiet. And then Mr. Winterbottom, the worm, would face him and say, "No, you asked for it. You can't treat people the way you treated me for ten years and get away with it. Now you've got to take what's comin' to you."

Suddenly he laughed aloud with satisfaction at the picture of Old Dougherty's humiliation. The sound echoed hollowly through the empty office. Mr. Hirsh jumped and asked, "What's the matter with you? What's so funny?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Winterbottom, "I was just thinking of a story." And the laugh died in him at the sight of Mr. Hirsh's pink sinister face. He could never turn on old W. M. and send him to jail because he'd lose his job and at his age he wouldn't very likely get another, never at thirty-five hundred a year. And he had to think of the missus and the four brats that were still at home living off him.

## 50

It was half-past nine when Old Dougherty arrived from the *News* office at the huge Tudor house in the Plattesville suburbs. The sight of the house, dreary and empty and dark

save for the light in the hall, made him feel suddenly tired and old. He had hoped that Jimmy would be back from Millersville. It was Jimmy he needed to see, Jimmy more than any other person on earth. Inside, he found a cold supper set out for him by Ella, the only servant who lived in the big house. Beside it there was a note from her saying that she had waited for him until eight-thirty and then gone to the movies.

For a second the misspelled note in illiterate handwriting filled him with fury. He thought, "I suppose she's seen that goddamned paper and thinks she can get away with what she wants now." But almost at once he saw that such reasoning was beyond the powers of Ella's mulatto intelligence and capacity for reflection. He thought, "I've got to keep my head. If my nerves go, I'm finished."

While he ate the cold supper he realized for the first time in his life that he was really tired and, save for the prospect of a fight, he was bored. He didn't want any more money. It was only power that he wanted—power that included not only Plattesville, but the State and perhaps after that power in national politics. He was sixty-one and that wasn't old. He might even end his career by being a senator in Washington; that would fix all these people who were attacking him. He wanted the power Bill Swain now had in the State party, and then suddenly, the thought occurred to him that perhaps Bill Swain had divined his ambition and discovered one or two of his tricks and was behind the crusade, more responsible for it than old Mrs. McLeod and that bastard Richardson. Maybe they were only stooges. Maybe the mysterious Mr. Richardson had been sent there in the beginning by Bill Swain.

He couldn't quite believe that Richardson was as smart as he appeared to be. No newspaperman picked off the street and jailed as a vagrant could be as smart as Richardson seemed to be. If he'd been that smart—smart enough to uncover all the uncomfortable details he had hinted at in the *Daily Shield and Banner*, he'd have a good job somewhere in Chicago, St. Louis or Kansas City. No, he decided, there was something fishy about the whole thing. And the sense of fishiness made him feel still more nervous and uncertain.

It was Jimmy he wanted—Jimmy to talk to—Jimmy to quiet his uneasiness—Jimmy with his optimism and rampant good health and his grin. He couldn't imagine what Jimmy could be doing in Millersville after nine o'clock.

When he had finished the cold snack he went into the empty library, took off his shoes, lay on the sofa and set himself to do some figuring. But his mind didn't work properly. A part of it kept listening to the sound of every motor that passed. He found himself rising up on the sofa, expecting each car to turn in at the drive and deliver Jimmy at the door. And presently it occurred to the old man that Jimmy was the only thing he had in the world on which he could count, to whom he could turn in trouble. Hirsh, Winterbottom, the magistrates, the police chief, even the Mayor himself would double-cross him if things went wrong; they'd turn and run for Bill Swain's camp waving the white flag, but he could always count on Jimmy.

Suddenly he sat up and poured himself a drink and half-aloud he said, "Get hold of yourself, W. M. Nothing's going to happen. You've got every local judge in your pocket. Don't lose your head."

Like a mangy old lion he shook himself and got up heavily. Then he went to the window and stayed there for a long time watching the lights of the cars that went past. One passed and then two and three and then two racing each other, but none of them turned in at the drive. And terrified he suddenly thought, "Maybe something's happened to him. Maybe he's had an accident. He always drives like a damned fool—hell bent for leather."

But quickly he told himself that if anything had happened to Jimmy he would have been notified, because everybody in the county knew Jimmy and the olive-green car. "You damned fool!" he told himself, "you're behaving like an old woman!" And again he thought, "If only that lousy barbecue was a week off instead of tomorrow." And then he thought, "Maybe feeling the way he does about that Baldwin girl, he's done something crazy." But that, he told himself, wasn't like Jimmy. Jimmy was too healthy to do anything like that.

At last it occurred to him that he was doing no good fuming at the window. He had meant to spend the evening planning how to fight the *Daily Shield and Banner* attack, and up to now he had done nothing whatever. He took another drink to steady himself and lay down on the sofa once more to work. But it was no good.

Eleven o'clock passed, and when he could bear it no longer he went to the telephone and called up the Lakeside Inn at Millersville, but Ira Miller only told him that Jimmy had left there a little after six o'clock. Then he called the Elks' Club and Hennessey's saloon, disguising his voice so that no one would suspect that on the other end of the wire was W. M. Dougherty, behaving like an hysterical old woman. But neither place had any news of him. And at last,

swallowing his pride, he called the El Dorado. It was nearly midnight, and in his anxiety he forgot to disguise his voice, so that the barman who answered said almost at once, "Hello, Mr. Dougherty," which infuriated the old man.

The barman said that Jimmy had been there, but had left about ten minutes earlier. The news brought such relief to the old man that he did not even resent it when the barman said with veiled insolence, "Yes, I guess you'll want to be seeing him tonight."

He had left the telephone and was returning to the library when he heard a car coming up the drive. His impulse was to go to the door, but he was ashamed of his anxiety and instead he returned to the sofa to lie down. He was just settling himself, when there came from the drive the sound of a violent crash followed by silence, and springing up again, the old man hurried to the porte-cochere door and switched on the light.

Outside, halfway into the garage, he saw Jimmy's olive-green roadster. The splintered doors of the garage leaned against the smashed hood. Unsteadily Jimmy climbed out. At the sight of the light and his father, he grinned sheepishly and said, "I guess I must have forgot about the doors."

Then as the old man descended the steps he discovered that Jimmy wasn't alone. Behind him, climbing out of the car was the figure of a woman with platinum blond hair, wearing a red fox fur. She, too, moved a little unsteadily. Her figure was vaguely familiar to the old man.

As they came toward him Jimmy said, "This is Fern Hedges. I brought her to have a drink. Fern and I are going to be married."



When he heard the name, a kind of apoplectic fury seized the old man. For a moment he couldn't speak at all but only made stuttering sounds. Then suddenly he burst out.

"You're not gonna marry her!" Then he shouted at Fern. "And you're never gonna set foot in this house. You're gonna clear out right now. Scram! Beat it!"

Fern, sobered a little by the spectacle of Old Dougherty's fury, looked to Jimmy for support, but he too found no words.

To Jimmy the old man said, "You must be crazy."

Then Fern found her tongue. "That's right. Call me names. Abuse me. I mighta known what kind of reception I'd get. Like father like son. Just a coupla shanty Irish." Her voice took on a wild shrill quality and she shouted, "I guess you won't be so smart when the *Daily Shield and Banner* gets through with you both. I guess you're gonna get showed up. Let me tell you, I wouldn't marry your lousy son." Then before starting away down the drive, she flung a parting shot, "I wouldn't think of marrying the son of a jail bird!"

Apoplexy seized Old Dougherty once more. Stuttering he shouted after her, "Get out, you dirty whore!" which only brought a fresh torrent of abuse thrown over Fern Hedges's shoulder as she made her unsteady way down the drive. At the sound of her screams windows opened in the houses next door and across the street.

For two or three minutes, the old man, breathing heavily, stood regarding his son. Then he said, "Come on in the house. Every bastard in the neighborhood's listening."

In the library he said to Jimmy, "Sit down!"

Jimmy sat down and threw the copy of the *Daily Shield and Banner* from his pocket on the table.

Still he said nothing, and presently Old Dougherty asked, “What’s got into you? Are you crazy?”

Jimmy covered his face with his hands. “I don’t know,” he said.

“A nice time to act like this—with the barbecue tomorrow.”

“I’ll be all right in the morning. I never have a hang-over.”

The father lighted a cigar and presently he said, “Well, it looks like your girl on the *Daily Shield and Banner* double-crossed you.”

But Jimmy didn’t answer anything.

“Is that what’s the matter with you?”

Still there wasn’t any answer. Jimmy just sat there, his face covered with his hands.

Old Dougherty shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. “It’s a hell of a way to act. Haven’t you got any guts?”

“I’ve got guts enough.”

“It’s no good acting like a damned romantic Irishman—a shanty Irishman at that. That lousy whore was right. You’re acting like a shanty Irishman.”

Again Jimmy didn’t answer him, and for a moment the old man was shaken. He’d never seen Jimmy like this.

“You’ve seen the *Daily Shield and Banner*?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you know we’ve got a fight ahead of us.”

“Sure, I know that.”

“Well, are you gonna chuck me?”

“Of course I’m not gonna chuck you.”

“Well, you act like it—going to Gashouse Mary’s to get drunk. Gashouse Mary’s of all places!”

Still Jimmy remained silent. Again the cigar shifted from one side of the old man’s mouth to the other.

He said, “Listen to me, kid.”

“I’m listening.”

“Maybe I haven’t paid enough attention to you. Maybe we oughta have talked more together, but I don’t have to tell you what a busy guy I am.” His voice grew soft. He was frightened now.

“No,” said Jimmy.

“I’m gonna tell you something I’ve never told you before. You see, kid, you’ve always had everything. When I was your age I was walking the streets lookin’ for a job. And before that I was a kid who came over steerage on a cattle boat with my old man and woman from Ireland in a famine year. I didn’t have anything to start with, and after I got married I wanted plenty—for your mother’s sake and after you were born, for your sake too. I wasn’t as good as your mother. I always knew you couldn’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear—anything more than I was—just shanty Irish. But I’m as smart as the next fella, and I wanted to have things for you and the old girl. I wanted to show people. I wanted the Doughertys to have money and be somebody, and then just when I got the money, she died. I guess that was kind of hard on you too—harder than it was on me. I’ve done a lot of things that weren’t what you’d call okay, but I did it because I wanted to get ahead—so you wouldn’t have to do ’em. I didn’t do ’em so that you could get drunk and tell the whole town you were gonna marry a cheap tart. It ain’t right, what

you're doin'. It ain't right to me and it certainly ain't right to yourself—you, a kid that's got everything."

Without looking up, Jimmy said, "I was never gonna marry Fern. It was just kind of a joke. I guess I was a little nuts tonight."

"I want you to get married to a nice girl with a good family and have a lot of nice kids. You're young and strong. You're the kind that ought to have a lot of kids, and if you marry the right girl, by the time the kids come along I guess the bad Dougherty will be kinda bred out of the stock. Get me?"

"Yeah."

"I'd like you to get married to somebody like that nice healthy Baldwin girl. I hoped it was gonna come off."

"Well, it won't now. Tonight's fixed that."

"I didn't know you felt like that about her. You've had plenty of girls, but none of 'em seemed to matter."

"They didn't."

"Why didn't you tell me? I'd have fixed it somehow." He was silent for a moment. "I'd even have given up the whole works and cleared out if it would have given you what you wanted."

"It wasn't as easy as that."

"What did you squabble about in the first place?"

Jimmy didn't answer him, and he said, "Was it because you tried to make her?"

"No. It wasn't like that. I didn't want it like that."

"Go on. Tell me what it was. Maybe I could fix it."

"Never mind. Forget it."

The old man looked at him for a long time, and then slowly a curious expression of shrewdness came into his face. At the same time it was the expression of a small boy who wants to hide something. In a low voice, he asked, "Was it something that had to do with me?" There was only silence, and presently Old Dougherty said, "I get you. I guess money isn't everything. I oughta thought about other things too, I guess. Sometimes you musta been ashamed of me."

"I wasn't ever ashamed of you."

The old man did something he had never done before in all his life. He rose heavily and went over and put his hand on the shoulder of his son. He said, "I got it. I see the spot you've been in. And now you can't go back on your old man. You know, you can if you want to, if it'll help you out of the jam. You can do what you like. I'll understand."

For the first time Jimmy looked up at him. The Irish blue eyes were bluer than ever because there was moisture in them. Fiercely, he said, "What do you think I am?"

"Listen," said Old Dougherty, "I can't run now. I'd run if it would help you, but it's too late now. I've gotta fight. You get me, don't you?"

"Yes."

"A week ago before that damned sheet came out, we could have called it all off. But it's too late now. I've gotta fight because I've never run away yet. And I've gotta fight ... you might as well know how bad it is. Maybe I've got to fight to keep from going to jail."

The speech sobered Jimmy completely. Looking up again he said, "Is it as bad as that?"

“If they’ve got enough dope on me and Bill Swain wants to frame me.”

“I didn’t know. I always sorta took things for granted.”

“There’s a lot of things I never told you—I guess because I was ashamed of ’em.” He patted Jimmy on the back and said, “You’d better get to bed now. Sleep it off, and tomorrow we’ve got to put on a bold face at the barbecue—tomorrow of all times. Maybe it’ll come out all right.”

So Jimmy left him and climbed the stairs to bed. When he undressed he took out of his pocket the crumpled telegram and read it again—“Everything is made up but it’s too late now.” With an exaggerated, tipsy carefulness he smoothed the bit of paper, folded it carefully and put it away between the pages of a copy of *Gulliver’s Travels* given him by his mother long ago when he was a small boy. He had an idea that some day he might want it.

## 51

At the *Daily Shield and Banner* office there was a meeting in progress until late into the night. It had begun when Mr. Simpson, the Baptist minister, telephoned at six o’clock to ask if he might have an interview with Mrs. McLeod. He had, he said in a somewhat unctuous voice, seen the *Daily Shield and Banner* and marked its appeal to the upright and God-fearing citizens of Plattesville. He would like to make up a reform committee to help in the fight.

Then Jim Newman called up from his undertaking establishment to say, “Bravo! It’s a great editorial. If you’re gonna be there a while I’ll come over. What about calling up

Sam Henderson and some of the boys and telling 'em to drive in?"

"Wait a minute," said Mrs. McLeod. And calling Mr. Richardson she told him what Jim Newman proposed and asked what she should tell him. "It's your show," she said, "you've got to decide."

"Tell them to come in," said Mr. Richardson. "It's always better to strike while the iron is hot."

So Jim Newman promised to bring some of the county boys, not Hal Pierce because he couldn't make it with his old-fashioned buckboard and pintos, but the others he promised would come.

Then about seven, Gashouse Mary rang up. "Swell!" she said on the telephone. "Hot stuff! That hit 'em right between the eyes." And when Mrs. McLeod told her about the impromptu meeting, she said, "I'll be up about ten o'clock when I get the place started. Will you still be there?"

"I guess maybe we'll be here most of the night," said Mrs. McLeod. There was a note of hysterical triumph in her voice. The excitement of battle was in her now. Her heart was beating like a trip hammer and her thin veined hands were shaking.

And there were other calls of congratulations, one or two anonymous ones of abuse which frightened Mrs. McLeod, but her fright she forgot quickly in the excitement. Nothing had happened to her like this since the old days when J. E. was alive and a force in politics. The lines went out of her face and a new look came into her eyes. It was like giving a party—a party which was a wonderful success.

By ten o'clock the office was crowded—so crowded that Mr. Richardson's orderly mind found it very difficult to

achieve anything approaching organization. The crowd rather startled Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson and Willie and Myrtle Ferguson; they had all expected a response but nothing like this gathering. And the mixture was an odd one including the Baptist and Methodist clergymen and several of their supporters, Jim Newman, fat and perspiring, with his legion of old timers from the county, Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins and three members of the Women's Municipal Improvement Committee, and last of all, and a little startling to some of the reformers, Gashouse Mary, wearing a red velvet suit, a hat with a plume and a white fox fur.

Once the door opened and she came in it was impossible not to notice her and utterly impossible to ignore her. The effect of the entrance was tremendous, and when Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins sidled up to Mrs. McLeod and whispered, "What is that woman doing here?" Mrs. McLeod said, "Don't you worry about her. She's one of our biggest supporters. She's got the whole river front organization."

Then Mary disappeared into the back room with Jim Newman and some of the old timers to have a drink out of Willie Ferguson's bottle of Bourbon. While they were gone, Mr. Richardson sent out for sandwiches and coffee, and his calm face took on a worried look as if he had found himself already faced with all the difficulties of a reform movement, as if he found it impossible to reconcile the presence on one committee of people as varied as the two clergymen, the powerful Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins and her stalwart female supporters, Jim Newman and his county cohorts and, worst of all, Gashouse Mary.

It was Gashouse Mary herself who solved the difficulty. When she returned from the printer's room well fortified by



Willie's Bourbon, she took Mr. Richardson into a corner.

Glancing around the room she said, "Pretty good, ain't it? Never thought we'd get a response like this. And there'll be a lot more tomorrow."

"There must have been a lot of people ready to fight Old Dougherty."

"Yeah, there are, only there wasn't anybody with the guts to start the fight. But the real reason is that this county hasn't had a good political fight in twenty years. It was achin' for one. I know this country ... there's nothing they like better. Look at their faces."

Mr. Richardson looked. Every face was flushed and excited. There was an enthusiasm everywhere. Jim Newman suddenly called across the room to Mrs. McLeod. "Like the old days, ain't it, Vinnie?"

In the corner Gashouse Mary said to Mr. Richardson, "And I don't want to put no spoke in the wheel. Don't put me on no committee or you'll be losin' all the pious rats and we need their votes. I'll go on workin' quiet, but just leave me out of it. Leave me be the power behind the throne."

So with a relieved face, Mr. Richardson at last returned to the long table and pounded on it to bring the room to order. Then he made one of his elegant speeches and suggested they elect a committee. As a stranger, he modestly suggested that the nominations be made by a committee consisting of Mrs. McLeod, the Baptist minister, Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, Sam Henderson and Jim Newman. Those five withdrew into Mrs. McLeod's cubbyhole, and in a little while returned with ten names which were unanimously accepted. Others, Mr. Simpson, the Baptist minister, suggested, could be called

later on as the God-fearing citizens of the county rose to support the crusade.

Then, having made arrangements for a public meeting the next day at the Baptist Church, the party broke up, leaving behind only the *Daily Shield and Banner* staff, Jim Newman and Gashouse Mary to shake hands and have a drink on the success of the opening salvo of the attack.

It was two o'clock when the party finally broke up with Gashouse Mary saying she must get back to the El Dorado. As she left, she turned in the doorway and said, "I forgot to tell you that Jimmy Dougherty was at the El Dorado again with that tart Fern Hedges. He was stinking and telling everyone he was going to marry her."

When she had gone Mr. Richardson said suddenly, "But where's Jane? She ought to have been here."

## 52

Jane was at home in her room in McLeod's Folly. About the time that the rally broke up in the *Daily Shield and Banner* office, she fell asleep worn out by the waves of anger and heartbreak which had swept over her since the moment she sent the telegram.

She had come straight home and gone to her room, and when Aida came up to tell her that supper was on the table and that Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson hadn't yet returned, Jane replied that very likely they weren't coming back and that she herself wanted nothing to eat. And when Aida insisted that she have a bite of something to eat, she grew angry and called through the door to Aida to go away and leave her in peace.

On receipt of this message Aida stood for a moment before the locked door in silence. Once she started to speak but before any words came out, closed her big mouth suddenly and turning away, went down the stairs.

Aida was angry, more angry than she had been since the day fifteen years earlier when Sam had run off to Memphis with that high-yaller girl who had the fancy name of Maisie Dangerfield. She was angry about a great many things—angry at Old Dougherty and his party, angry because the excitement of the *Daily Shield and Banner's* rebirth had upset the household and made meals irregular, most of all angry at Jimmy Dougherty for making uppity Miss Jane so miserable. But the final prod to her anger was the thought of the excellent supper she had cooked, sitting downstairs in the kitchen with nobody to eat it.

Anger, genuine fierce anger, was a rare emotion with Aida. She sulked often enough and she had “miseries,” but she hadn’t really been angry since Sam’s elopement. Now, after fifteen years, she was wild and her anger was monumental and spectacular.

Downstairs in the kitchen, she put the whole of the supper she had cooked on two trays and carried them downstairs to the three tramps who occupied the furnace room, telling them when they had finished to put the trays at the top of the cellar steps. Then she went upstairs again, put on her hat and coat, locked all the doors, bolted the windows and went out. Only Jane, weeping in her room and the tramps seated around the packing case in the furnace room, gorging tomato soup, roast chicken and chocolate cake, remained to occupy McLeod’s Folly.

As she went down the path between the bedraggled syringas she thought, “That’ll fix ’em. When they come back they won’t find nobody in the house and nothin’ to eat. That’ll learn ’em. Never callin’ up or nothin’.”

Closing the gate behind her she set out straight for Darkietown. She hadn’t been there in a long time, but she knew just where she wanted to go ... to Joe’s Place. There she would find corn liquor and music and good company. And most of all she’d hear a lot of gossip and news, the kind of gossip and news you could only get in Joe’s Place, the kind of news that Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson and even Willie Ferguson could never uncover. Because in Joe’s Place gathered the cream of Darkietown. As soon as the sun had well set, the cream gathered there, out of kitchens and shops and laundries from all over Plattesville, and with them they brought news about how Mr. and Mrs. McGuire had quarreled and Mrs. McGuire had hit him with a cocktail shaker and how Mr. Campbell was running after Mrs. Barry and how Mrs. Barry’s daughter Esther had been all night at a tourist camp with the Jenkinson boy. In Joe’s Place they knew practically everything that went on in the houses of the rich and respectable in the upper part of town.

Joe was a big café-au-lait buck of forty-five, and at sight of Aida he gave a cheer and a signal to the banjo, trombone players and the drummer, and Aida made her entrance to a fanfare fit for the entrance of a star circus performer. Joe knew Aida, and he knew she never came in except to celebrate. She was a lot nearer to the good old days than most of Joe’s customers, and she knew a lot of plantation songs and dances that the rest of them had never heard or had forgotten. When Aida came Joe never allowed her to pay for

her drinks, because she was worth plenty of money as an entertainer.

Tonight when Joe greeted her, he saw that she was mad, and that meant that she was going to get going and give a fine performance. There was a berserk look in her eyes, and at sight of her the whole tempo of Joe's Place went up and that meant that there would be a record amount of drinking, and that when at last the dawn came up and the last customer had departed, the till would be full. The news of Aida's arrival sped from mouth to mouth in Darkietown, and presently the low-ceilinged smoky room was so full that you couldn't have squeezed one more dark face into the place. So the overflow audience stood at the open window, and Joe and Joe's wife and three café-au-lait daughters passed drinks out the window to them.

It took a lot of drinks to get Aida under way. The berserk mood clung, and for a time the corn liquor only made her anger the more sultry. It wasn't till Joe himself began paying her elaborate compliments and offered to do an old-fashioned buck and wing with her, that the look of sullen fury faded from her face.

The white teeth showed for a moment in a grin and she said, "You all can't do no real buck and wing, Joe Jackson. You're nothin' but a kid. You all doan know nothin' about it."

Then Joe made some crack about her sex appeal and she let out a bellow of Rabelaisian laughter, but it took two more stiff drinks to get her on her feet. When she got there on her feet in a space cleared in the middle of the floor before the banjo player, she lifted her skirts and with a yell went into a dance that none of the younger ones could equal for intricacy and speed.

When she had finished the buck and wing and got her breath and had another drink she sang for them an old plantation song called, "When the Cotton is a-poppin'." The crowd outside the window kept getting bigger and bigger, and Joe and his family kept passing more and more drinks over the heads of the enraptured audience. Altogether, it was a night such as Joe's Place seldom knew. And presently Aida forgot her anger altogether and danced again and sang more songs. She was enjoying herself, but in the back of her mind something rankled, some dark little demon which wouldn't be chased away by banjo music and corn liquor. Now and then, right in the middle of the music, Aida would remember that there was something on her mind that she had to get settled. Like a shadow the knowledge of it would cross her wild enjoyment, and she would try to reach out and capture the demon and identify him.

It wasn't until a little after midnight when one of the musicians from the El Dorado, drawn by the news that Aida was in Joe's Place, came over to have a drink, that she remembered what the demon was which wouldn't leave her alone. While she was drinking with him, he said, "Old man Dougherty's son is at the El Dorado. He's drunk and tellin' everybody he's gonna marry that whore Fern Hedges."

Then she knew. She had come out to enjoy herself, but she'd come out too to get something on Jimmy Dougherty so she could go back and tell Miss Jane and show her what kind of poor trash he was so that she wouldn't go on eatin' her heart out about him.

And now she had it ... just what she wanted. Jimmy Dougherty was delivered into her hands. Dimly, through all the haze of music and corn liquor she felt a single

compulsion. She must get on her feet and go straight home and tell Miss Jane. Then Miss Jane would know what kind of poor white trash the Doughertys were ... his goin' around and tellin' everybody he was gonna marry a whore like Fern Hedges.

In the middle of a drink, she rose unsteadily to her feet and said, "Ah'se goin' home."

Joe stepped in front of her and said in a wheedling voice, "Not yet, sister. We ain't had enough singin' and dancin'."

But Aida was determined. Quietly, but with an awful firmness, she took up a beer bottle from the table at her side. Holding it high above her head she said once more with an awful firmness, "Ah'se goin' home."

There was a murmur of protest and Joe tried again to argue with her, but she only repeated, "Ah'se goin' home," and took two steps forward. This time Joe, remembering the old story of what Aida had done to her husband Sam when the high-yaller girl Maisie Dangerfield left him and he came home, stepped aside. The music stopped, and the banjo player stood up craning his neck for a better view; the crowd drew aside making a little pathway, and Aida, still carrying the beer bottle, went toward the doorway surrounded by an aura of authority and dignity.

But at the very door, she halted and unsteadily, helped by one or two of those standing near the doorway, she climbed on a chair. Still holding the bottle high above her head she cried out to the sea of dark faces, "And we gotta clear that poor white trash Dougherty outta this town. You all got to vote against him. You all ought to be ashamed to let Plattsville be run by white trash that belongs in shanty town."

The speech was greeted by cheers and cries of “Sure, Aida! Sure!”—“Clear ’em out”—“Sure, we’ll clear ’em out if you all come back and dance.”

But the mood for dancing was gone from Aida, gone before the power of an obsession. She had to straighten out Miss Jane’s life. She had to tell her what kind of fellow Jimmy Dougherty was.

So unsteadily, amid cheers, she got down from the chair, left Joe’s Place and set out for McLeod’s Folly. As she walked, she kept muttering to herself, “Ah’ll fix him. The poor white trash! Ah’ll fix him! He won’t humble no McLeod no more with his poor white trash ways.”

Unsteadily, she opened the gate and unsteadily she climbed the steps to the high front porch. Fumbling, she put the key in the lock and opened the door and entered the dark hallway. In her haste and her singleness of purpose she did not even trouble to remove the key or close the door. Weaving a little, she made her way up the huge broad stairway and went straight to the door of Jane’s room. Then, planting her big feet firmly, she pounded on the door with the beer bottle.

After a moment the frightened voice of Jane called out, “What’s the matter? Who’s there?” And Aida answered, “It’s only me. Don’t you be scared, honey. I just waked you up to tell you what kind of bastard that Jimmy Dougherty is. He’s drunk down at Gashouse Mary’s place tellin’ all the white trash in Plattesville he’s gonna marry that Fern Hedges.”

Then for a moment Aida was silent, standing with the beer bottle poised, awaiting an answer. But the only answer was the sound of sobbing and Aida said, “You go to sleep, honey. Doan you trouble your poor little pretty haid about no Dougherty.”



The sobbing continued, and presently Aida, muttering and feeling suddenly sleepy, turned away and made an uncertain progress down the stairs. With each step the drowsiness increased. Near the bottom of the stairs she let the beer bottle fall. It rolled down the steps before her. At last, when she had reached the hall itself she felt unwilling to let go of the rail until she found a fresh support, and looking drowsily about she chose the coatrack made in the form of a tree trunk with bears climbing up it. It was three or four steps away and this distance she managed without falling, but as she seized the rack for support the whole thing toppled and fell, Aida with it. She made one feeble effort to regain her feet and then, overcome with sleep, gave it up and lay back. In a moment she was soundly sleeping on her back, covered by a mass of hats and raincoats, her mouth open a little way, snoring happily in the dim knowledge that she had fixed Mr. Dougherty and done a good deed. Now maybe Miss Jane would forget about Jimmy Dougherty and marry that nice Mr. Richardson and keep the *Daily Shield and Banner* in the family.

When Mr. Richardson and Mrs. McLeod came in about half-past two, they found her thus, snoring quietly. It took them nearly half an hour to get her out from under the coats, on her feet and into bed.

## 53

At Millersville the next day the annual Democratic barbecue and picnic took place as usual. There were fifteen barrels of beer consumed, and three steers and ten sheep roasted over piles of red-hot coals prepared a whole day in advance by cousin Ira Miller's hired man. There were prizes

given for the biggest fish caught and the greatest number of fish caught in the deep sapphire blue lake, and a bathing beauty contest and a baby contest, and there was music from loud-speakers scattered here and there among the trees of the cottonwood grove.

Outwardly, the affair was a great success. Children got lost, one fell in the lake and was rescued, four or five henchmen who came, armed with their own corn liquor, passed out and were left sleeping in the shade until it was time to go home, two women had a hair-pulling match and fourteen young ladies, after retiring into the bushes with admirers, returned “engaged” for the time being. It was, outwardly, the same as all the other barbecues that had taken place since Old Dougherty held the first one, more than ten years earlier. But in the heart of Old Dougherty, there was a difference.

As he walked about kissing babies and passing out cigars and slapping backs and paying compliments to bathing beauties, his heart wasn’t somehow in the business. In the kisses, the backslaps, the compliments, there wasn’t the old, almost mechanical enthusiasm. He went through all the motions, but inside himself there was a hollow feeling. The whole performance, which he had always before enjoyed with such gusto, didn’t give him any pleasure. It seemed to him that the crowd was enjoying itself, but that there was a difference, and the difference, it seemed, had to do with him. He fancied that whenever he joined a new group under the cottonwood trees, all the people in it fell silent and embarrassed, and that when he had passed out cigars and kissed the babies and made plenty of bad jokes, they didn’t seem as pleased or laugh as heartily as they had done in other

years. And once or twice when he had left a little circle of picnickers, he found himself turning as he walked away to see whether they were putting their heads together to talk about him and the *Daily Shield and Banner* attack. Always inside him there was a voice saying, “Look out! Watch your step! If things go wrong, they’ll all desert you. They’ll even turn on you.”

Between groups, between backslaps, he kept trying to reassure himself. “There’s nothing to be scared of,” he’d keep telling himself. “They haven’t got anything on you. Even Bill Swain can’t do anything. His own books ain’t clear. He wouldn’t dare do nothing.”

But this voice wasn’t as convincing as the other one. Somehow, it rang as hollow as his insides felt. And just as he had himself about persuaded that there wasn’t anything to be worried about, he’d come to another little group under the trees or someone would speak to him and he’d have to become cheerful and backslapping again, and each time this happened he felt a little more tired and a little more empty. But the thing that troubled him most was how much the *Daily Shield and Banner* outfit knew and who this guy Richardson was. That was a guy who knew his stuff too well to be just a tramp reporter.

And whenever he thought of Mr. Winterbottom and Mr. Hirsh he was troubled, for very different reasons. Mr. Winterbottom was just a broken reed and no help to anybody at a time like this. He was nothing but a stooge and a stooge who didn’t like his boss. Hirsh was another kettle of fish, worse because he was dangerous and unpredictable. There were times when Hirsh got fresh, so fresh you’d think he was the one who owned the *Daily News*. He might do something

rash that would make a hell of a lot of trouble. Old Dougherty knew plenty about him and suspected that there was plenty more he didn't know. Hirsh was bigtime stuff. Maybe he wouldn't understand that you could get away with stuff in Chicago that wouldn't wash up in a middle-sized town like Plattsville.

And then, right in the middle of his worries, Old Dougherty would have to pass out a cigar or make a joke or slap somebody's back, or kiss a smelly baby.

And Jimmy. Whenever the old man caught a glimpse of him, it seemed to him that Jimmy was a stranger. He wasn't the Jimmy who usually went about, radiant, healthy, good-looking, followed by half a dozen girls, making everybody laugh wherever he showed up. This Jimmy looked gray and wilted. His heart wasn't in his job. Watching him during the afternoon, Old Dougherty kept thinking, "The damned fool! And he said he never had a hang-over." Whenever Jimmy grinned it was like the grin of a pair of false teeth. When he shook hands it was like shaking hands with a wax dummy.

Twice during the afternoon Old Dougherty with Mr. Hirsh and Mr. Winterbottom retired to a room in Cousin Ira's hotel to discuss what course they were to take in replying to the opening article of the *Daily Shield and Banner's* campaign, but they came to no conclusion whatever because Mr. Hirsh's methods were inclined to be unorthodox, not to say strong-arm, and in Mr. Winterbottom whatever there had been of originality had long since been destroyed by Old Dougherty's steam-rollering. And each time, before they were able to get down to business, Ira Miller came with a message that Old Dougherty was wanted at once in the grove to present a prize. So at last, late in the afternoon, Mr. Hirsh and Mr.

Winterbottom left together to return to the *News* office to confer again in an attempt to devise some plan which would meet with the approval of the old man.

Jimmy and Old Dougherty only left Millersville at seven o'clock when the only picnickers who remained were two middle-aged drunks deserted by disgusted wives. They were still sleeping peacefully at the far end of the grove.

Although father and son rode side by side all the way back to Plattesville, neither of them talked much. Jimmy's head ached, and when he tried to speak his throat felt paralyzed, and anyway he didn't give a damn about whether the picnic was a success or not or about what plan they were to adopt to meet the *Daily Shield and Banner's* attack. He couldn't think of anything except Jane Baldwin and the fact that he had never felt about any girl the way he felt about her. Wildly he kept asking himself, "What the hell do politics matter anyway? Who cares anything about running a town like Plattesville?"

Because he was by nature the healthiest of young animals the hang-over filled him with despair. He drove wildly, as he always did, and once or twice when the car jolted into a rut he thought, "There's something awful the matter with me. I'm going to die." And then almost immediately he thought, "I could scam from this town. Jane and I could clear out from the whole lot." But almost at once he saw that such a plan was impossible. Very likely she would never talk to him, let alone run off with him. And there was pride to be considered as well. He, a Dougherty, would ask no favors of a McLeod. It wasn't only pride which troubled him but Irish pride, the toughest, stiffest, most unnecessary pride in the world. And anyway, he couldn't double-cross the old man.

Suddenly he groaned aloud, and Old Dougherty asked, "What's the matter; you sick?"

"No. Nothing's the matter."

The old man didn't ask any more questions because he was worrying over his own problems and still trying to convince himself that nobody had anything on him, and that Mr. Hirsh wasn't just a dangerous racketeer and Winterbottom wasn't a complete and useless nincompoop.

Presently he said, "A pity it had to be cloudy today."

"Yeah," said Jimmy. "It was a damned shame."

The odd thing was that there hadn't been a vestige of a cloud in the sky throughout the whole day.

## 54

It was after eight o'clock when they finally arrived at the *News* office to find Mr. Hirsh and Mr. Winterbottom still waiting for them. They sat on opposite sides of the office, their backs to each other, each studying a copy of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. With a snort, Old Dougherty observed that, so far as he could see, very little conferring had taken place.

Gathered about the conference table none of them underestimated either the toughness of the task which confronted them or the cleverness of Mr. Richardson. Paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, word by word, Old Dougherty, Mr. Hirsh and Mr. Winterbottom examined the full-page editorial. Jimmy took part, but with listlessness.

To their astonishment they discovered that not once in the whole editorial, covering an entire page, had a name been

mentioned—either the name of Old Dougherty, or Jimmy, or Mr. Hirsh, or Magistrate Flynn or the Chief of Police Harry Bingham. Mr. Richardson had simply made grave and outright accusations of graft and corruption appealing to the consciences and honesty of the good citizens of Plattesville, and calling upon them to fix the responsibility upon the guilty parties. “It was not,” he wrote, “for the *Daily Shield and Banner* to name the criminals. The citizens of Plattesville knew them only too well.”

Such tactics confused the group about the conference table in the office of the *Daily News*. They could not defend Old Dougherty, the Mayor, the magistrate and the police chief without, at the same time, accusing them.

For three hours they argued, Old Dougherty holding the balance between the recklessness of the guinea pig Mr. Hirsh and the timorousness of the disarranged Mr. Winterbottom. Jimmy contributed no more than an occasional “Yes” or “No,” and uttered the only words of wisdom during the entire conference when he said, “If you want my opinion, you’ll ignore the whole damn thing.” But he had neither the energy nor the spirit to push his idea and they took no notice of it.

At the end of the three hours they had framed a personal attack upon Mr. Richardson and secondarily upon Mrs. McLeod. When the editorial was finished they left it for Mr. Winterbottom to put into passable English.

In it they called Mr. Richardson a crank and an upstart stranger who had come to Plattesville to meddle and stir up trouble among its honest and peaceful citizens. It referred to what it called his “criminal record,” pointing out that he had come to Plattesville as a vagrant and been arrested and convicted. He had, the *Daily News* continued, been kindly

released on parole and had repaid the kindness of Police Magistrate Flynn and the citizens of Plattesville by attacking them and accusing them of corruption and vice. Mrs. McLeod, the *Daily News* treated as an elderly and kindly half-wit who had been victimized by an adventurer. They made no mention of Old Dougherty himself because they dared not without fixing the attack of the *Daily Shield and Banner* directly upon him.

It was, all in all, a feeble reply, and it was very bad tactics, for it gave Mr. Richardson, now warmed to battle, a chance on the following day to write one of his most elegant replies. Yes, he wrote, the managing editor of the *Daily Shield and Banner* had been counted as a vagrant simply because he had come to Plattesville out of luck and broke and looking for a job. Instead of acting as the Good Samaritan had acted in the Bible, the city administration had seized him, thrown him into jail and prosecuted him. It had meant to make him work in what was virtually a chain gang in order that the gangsters of Plattesville could collect from its citizens the pay roll which should have gone to Plattesville citizens out of jobs and needing the work. Then he launched into an account of the sufferings of workless honest men so moving and so eloquent, that Mrs. McLeod, reading it in proofs in the office, had burst into tears. At the end there was only a brief and dignified reference to Mrs. McLeod, "One of our oldest, best-known and best-loved citizens. Her character, her intelligence, her charm, her love of Plattesville and the county all place her in an impregnable position beyond all attack."

It was a great success, the editorial. It sold hundreds of papers and moved the soft-hearted to tears at the sufferings



and mistreatment of honest men who came to Platteville looking for work. For days afterward the gang of convicted vagrants which dug ditches and removed the garbage of Platteville was troubled at its work by the kind glances and smiles and even gifts of chocolate and cigarettes bestowed on them indiscriminately—tramps, bums and honest workmen alike—by sentimental and soft-hearted Platteville women. And Platteville really loved Lavinia McLeod. It didn't like her attacked even by implication.

And the novel was having a great success. It wasn't until three days after the appearance of the first installment that Old Dougherty realized the subtlety of Mr. Richardson in placing "The Good Old Days" on the page opposite the editorial attacks. On the left hand one read of the existing decay and corruption, and on the page opposite, one read the history of the town, of the struggles of its earliest citizens to found a community where liberty, honesty, justice and charity should have a great place. In Mrs. McLeod's narrative there was a stirring account of the founding and activities of the first committees of vigilantes who brought to order the gamblers, the confidence queens, the bad men at the moment of the land rush. Tacitly, quietly, the juxtaposition of the two pages said, "What we need in Platteville is a committee of vigilantes. What we need is a thorough cleaning up."

Suddenly the *Daily Shield and Banner* became the interesting paper of Platteville. Nearly everyone bought it to learn the latest revelations and read the latest installment of "The Good Old Days."

It sold in bundles, and because everybody in Platteville and the county took to reading it, advertisers came in in numbers so great that within a fortnight after the opening

salvo of the crusade, two pages had to be added to every edition.

Across the Square in the office of the *Daily News*, Mr. Hirsh and the nervous editor and Old Dougherty held conference after conference, always with a division of opinion which only served to block and confuse every solution and every possible answer to the attacks which kept coming day after day like the fast punches of an expert boxer, giving them no time to gain their breath. Mr. Winterbottom developed a bad case of jitters and was for writing page after page of wordy editorials in reply, but Old Dougherty told him rudely that no one would even trouble to read them. Mr. Hirsh continued to propose out of his past, gangster methods of suppressing the *Daily Shield and Banner*. Once Old Dougherty would have agreed to these without a quiver. He would have put sand in the bearings of the *Daily Shield and Banner's* press or even consented to dynamiting or setting fire to the funny little old red-brick building which housed that hated journal; but now he was held back, not checked so much by his own conscience as by the spectacle of Jimmy's face growing leaner and more unhappy every day, and by the spectacle of his drinking. For the sake of Jimmy, he couldn't any longer use such methods, and there were Jimmy's as yet nonexistent children to be considered, the Doughertys of the future who wouldn't be like himself, racketeers and grafters, but gentlemen worthy of living in that huge Tudor house far out on Fleming Avenue.

Sometimes Jimmy came to the conferences, but more often than not he found an excuse for not appearing, and when he did appear, he only sat there glumly, offering no suggestions

and only speaking to suppress some outrageous proposal of Mr. Hirsh, the guinea pig.

## 55

In Plattessville the hot sun of the Southwest rose and set the same as usual. There were cloudy days and bright ones and people went about their work as usual. But behind the weather and underneath the daily routine there was a difference. Beneath the surface there were excitement and a new curiosity and suspicions and nervousness. Citizens with a taste for reforming began to join the committee and organize meetings; others, with less active consciences, suddenly suspected that if things were changed in the city and county administration, the taxes might be less. And a great many of the old timers became interested because they discerned the prospect of a good fight.

Once or twice Old Dougherty was hooted at by boys in the street, and once when he passed a gang of convicted vagrants riding on top of a truck loaded with ashes and garbage, he was greeted by ironic cheers. His face turned bright red with anger, and for a moment his head whirled with dizziness and he thought, "I'm going to have a stroke. That's what I'm going to have." And it was all the worse because there wasn't anything he could do. If he came down on the prisoners in revenge, the *Daily Shield and Banner* would discover it and write fresh attacks.

And then the *Daily Shield and Banner* announced that one month before the Democratic primaries, the Reform and Fusion party would hold a monster parade, a torchlight procession such as had once taken place in reconstruction days when Plattessville was Plattessville. The primaries were

still a good month away, but there should be, said the *Daily Shield and Banner*, plenty of time to organize. Mr. Richardson was playing up “The Good Old Days,” and when Old Dougherty read that particular editorial, he swore long and loudly. He saw what they were trying to do; they meant to show him up as an outsider, a newcomer who had come to Plattsville to introduce graft and corruption.

In his own party he began to discover signs of restlessness and disloyalty. Handshakes were less cordial; the old sycophantic note began to disappear from the voices of those to whom he had given jobs or assigned some petty graft. Once or twice he noticed that men who once had treated him as if he were a king turned aside or left when he entered Hennessey’s saloon. These signs did not fill him with despair; they enraged him and brought on again and again that feeling that he was about to have a stroke. And at last Gashouse Mary met him one day just as he was leaving Hennessey’s place. This time, instead of pretending as she had always done that she did not see him, she came up to him and said, “Good morning, Mr. Dougherty. How’s things?”

He tried not to betray his anger but managed to grin and say, “Okay. How are they with you?”

“Couldn’t be better. I see quite a lot of your son nowadays.”

His face went suddenly crimson and he said, “I told him not to go near your joint.”

Gashouse Mary seemed untroubled. She only said, “Well, boys will be boys, and I suppose he’s grown up now. It’s pretty hard to tell a grown-up man what to do.” She held out her hand and, startled, he took it and gave it a half-hearted

flabby shake. "I'll be running along now," she said, "I'm pretty busy these days. Good-by."

And pertly she turned and started off up the street. Old Dougherty, looking after her, still speechless, felt a sudden desire to laugh. In his heart he had always liked Gashouse Mary, recognizing her as someone like himself who had always made war on society. He had suspected for a long time that she was helping that nincompoop Richardson, with all the knowledge of the underworld that had come to her out of years spent in St. Louis and Memphis and Natchez and New Orleans. For a long time he had suspected that she was providing Richardson with choice information and details, and now he knew it. He knew it by the flirt of her skirt as she walked, by the pertness of the plume in her picture hat. And he wanted to laugh because he couldn't help admiring the old girl. It was wonderful to be as spry as that at her age.

Like a lot of others, she thought she had him down. His big jaw set firmly and half-aloud he said, "I'm not through yet. I'll show the old bitch. I'll show all of 'em."

## 56

Late one afternoon, Mr. Richardson came into Mrs. McLeod's cubbyhole, shut the door after him, and sat down. Before he spoke he took off his glasses and looked at her.

"There are a couple of things on my mind," he said.

"Yes?"

"This is the first," he said, and passed a telegram to her.

She was growing a little weary of the crusade. The constant excitement, the constant attacking, had somehow worn her down, and there were moments now when she

thought, "I'm too old to have started something like this. I wish it was over and finished. It's too much for me." And the weariness made her nervous and at times even afraid, as if it were herself and not Old Dougherty who was the guilty one. So when she took the telegram she was frightened.

With a faint twinkle in his gray-blue eyes he watched her as she read it. Twice she read it through, her hand trembling. Then she looked at him and said, "It's true, isn't it? I mean, it isn't a joke?"

"No, it isn't a joke."

"But twenty-five hundred dollars. That's impossible."

"That's just what I wired back."

She looked puzzled and asked, "You mean you told them you thought it must be a mistake?"

"Yes, if a publisher offers you twenty-five hundred advance, you'll get five thousand, so all I wired back was 'Not enough.' Mrs. McLeod, that's a great book. And I know what I'm talking about. The whole country is just waiting for that book."

She looked alarmed, "But I can't refuse twenty-five hundred dollars. I haven't the right to." Tears came into her eyes. "Now I may not get anything and you don't know how I need it."

Mr. Richardson leaned forward and patted her knee. "You leave that to me," he said. "If the first publisher who saw it thought that it was worth twenty-five hundred advance, believe me, you'll get a lot more. I'm awfully glad because it proves that The Book was as good as I thought it was."

She began to cry and said, "It can't be true. I'm sure it's a joke. It's a mean joke being played on me by somebody."

“No, it’s not a joke.”

“You don’t know how badly I need that money. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to worry you, but the bank won’t renew the first and second mortgages on McLeod’s Folly.”

“What bank?”

“The ... County Bank.”

The gray-blue eyes grew hard. “Old Dougherty’s bank, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“I thought they’d be trying something like that.”

“And they’re coming down on me for the paper bill. Unless it’s paid they won’t deliver any more newsprint.”

“They’ve been busy,” said Mr. Richardson, “haven’t they?” For a second time since she knew him she saw the veins stand out in his throat. For a second time she saw the pencil he held in his hand snap in two. Then he said, “Well, there’s more than one way of killing a hog. We’ve got to go ahead with it now.”

“With what?”

“We’ve got to come out in the open. We’ve got to take the next step. We’ve got to demand an investigation and an indictment. We’ve got all the dope we need. We can send Old Dougherty to jail for twenty years and that pip-squeak gangster Hirsh along with him. Bill Swain is ready to push the thing to the end. Even the local judge won’t be able to let off the gang.”

Suddenly Mrs. McLeod grew excited, “No, no. We can’t do that. We can’t go that far.”

“Why not?”

“On account of Jane.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“It might end up by Jimmy going to jail too.”

The rage of Mr. Richardson seemed to grow less violent. “No,” he said, “I don’t think we need worry about that. There isn’t any evidence of Jimmy being mixed up in it. I think the old man has kept him out of all the dirty work. So far as I can see that’s the only decent thing about him.”

“But even if Jimmy wasn’t mixed up ... Old Dougherty is his father.”

“So what?”

“It would mean that the grandfather of Jane’s children was a jailbird.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Richardson. “You’ve got a long way ahead of me ... a couple of generations ahead of me.” He fell silent and put on his glasses again.

Mrs. McLeod was trembling now. She’d forgotten the news of The Book. She’d forgotten the success of their campaign and the rising circulation of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. She said, timidly, conscious that she was being a little foolish, “I don’t want to hurt anybody. I didn’t know when we started this campaign that it would mean prison and ugly things like that. Sometimes I wish I’d never thought of it. Sometimes I wish....” She halted abruptly and her wrinkled face grew red.

Mr. Richardson grinned, “I know. You wish you’d never got me out of jail and given me a job.”

“No, of course not. I don’t mean that. Only....”

“That’s the trouble with this reform business,” said Mr. Richardson, “it all gets so mixed up.”



“And there’s Harry Bingham and his eight children. I don’t want to get him in trouble.”

Mr. Richardson swore quietly to himself. Then he said, “Now, sit down, Mrs. McLeod, let’s talk this out.” She sat down and he said, “Now, listen to me. You’re up against a gang of crooks. They wouldn’t spare you if they had you in the same spot. They’re going to fight, and even if you stopped the campaign right now it wouldn’t stop them. They’re after our skins, and we’ve got to fight whether we want to or not. Look at them! They’re calling in the mortgages. They’re making trouble with the paper company. They’ll do worse than that before they’re through.”

“I know,” she said weakly. “Only it’s so hard ... to think of sending people to prison. Prison is so awful.”

“They asked for it,” said Mr. Richardson. “They’ve been asking for it for years, and now they’re getting it, they can’t take it.”

Mrs. McLeod suddenly looked guilty. “I guess I’ve got to confess something.”

“What?”

“I wrote a letter to Jimmy Dougherty.”

“For heaven’s sake, what for?”

With a great effort, her face crimson, Mrs. McLeod said, “I wrote and told him that Jane was in love with him and that she didn’t have anything to do with the crusade and couldn’t help it, and that when it was all blown over they ought to be friends again.” For a second she was silent, struggling to go on with her confession. “It was worse than that, I told him that we wouldn’t do anything really serious on account of him and Jane.”

“Oh, my God!” said Mr. Richardson and began to laugh. He laughed and laughed until Mrs. McLeod began to be a little alarmed. Then, still a little breathless, he said, “There’s nobody like you ... nobody in the world.”

“Were you laughing at me? I don’t see what’s so funny.”

“No, not at you exactly. Maybe you’re right. Maybe it’s always better to be human. Only, don’t you see, Jimmy’ll take the letter right to his father and they’ll have the laugh on us.” His face grew suddenly serious. “You see, we can’t stop it now. The whole State organization is mixed up in it.”

“I wish we could.”

“Did you tell Jane what you did?”

“Heaven’s sake, no. I wouldn’t dare. She’d kill me.”

“How do you know she wanted you to do such a thing?”

“I didn’t have to be told. Look at the girl.”

“She does look kinda peaked, as Willie would say.”

“And wild horses would never get the reason out of her. She just goes on saying she doesn’t care if she never sees Jimmy Dougherty again. She says if she met him on the street she wouldn’t speak to him. It’s that damned McLeod pride.”

“You don’t seem to have much of it,” said Mr. Richardson.

Mrs. McLeod grinned, “I once had a lot, but I’ve learned plenty. I’m an old woman. I’ve learned that sometimes pride can be your worst enemy. Sometimes it can spoil your whole life.”

“You’re the top,” said Mr. Richardson. “You beat everything for getting things mixed up.”

Suddenly Mr. Richardson grew serious, “How much is the mortgage?” he asked.

“It’s for ten thousand dollars—a first mortgage on McLeod’s Folly. And there’s interest too—interest for two years.” For a moment her eyes grew damp and he thought she was going to cry. “That’s why I need that twenty-five hundred dollars so badly. It would help a little.”

“Not enough,” said Mr. Richardson. “Is there anything you can mortgage to meet it?”

“Everything’s been mortgaged. There isn’t any margin left.”

For a time he was silent. Then he said, “I’ll go and talk to them.”

“It won’t do any good, especially now after all that’s happened.”

“I wish I’d known about this before.”

“I never thought they’d do anything like this.”

And again he was silent before her great innocence. At last he said, “Who shall I see at the bank?”

“The president is Elmer Hoskins. I guess he’d be the best.”

“Thanks, I’ll have a talk with him. Forget about it for the moment. I think maybe I can fix it.”

This time she could not stop the tears. They flooded down her face despite every effort to stop them. Sobbing, she said, “I don’t see why you bother about me. You’re so good to me. I’m such a muddled old fool.”

Embarrassed, he bent down and put a strong arm about her thin shoulders.

“It’s because I’m fond of you and I think you a wise and wonderful creature.”

And after a little pause, the square angle of his jaw grew sharp and he added, “And because I’d like to give those

bastards a good licking....”

## 57

It was true that Jane looked peaked. Each day she grew a little more pale. She did her work, but listlessly, without the interest she had shown before the crusade began. And now, suddenly, the worst sign of all, the thing which had alarmed Aunt Vinnie more than anything else—she seemed to grow reconciled to the fact that everything was finished between her and Jimmy Dougherty. She even became amiable in a gentle way with Mr. Richardson and was no longer quarrelsome with old Willie Ferguson. She began to have what Mrs. McLeod called to herself “that old maid look” of resignation, almost of peace, that she had seen so often on the faces of aging spinsters of her own generation who had, when young, been disappointed in love. Mrs. McLeod knew that look; it was an awful thing in the face of a girl as young and pretty as Jane. She tried to tell herself that this sort of thing never happened any more, but she was not convinced, not with Jane’s face there in front of her all the time, more listless, more gentle, more anemic every day. She had always thought Jane incapable of love in the sense she herself and a few of her generation had known it; Jane, she had always believed, was a modern young woman and love didn’t make much difference to modern women. And yet, here was Jane’s face, always in front of her, at breakfast in the morning, all day in the office, at home at supper in the evening, always with that patient, resigned “old maid look” in it. For Jane didn’t even go out to the movies any more, even when Mr. Richardson asked her once or twice.

“It is,” thought Mrs. McLeod, a little thrilled like the hopeless romantic she was, “just like the story of Romeo and Juliet.”

And perhaps that was how the idea of playing Friar Lawrence and writing the letter had come to her.

The effect of the letter upon Jimmy wasn't exactly what Mrs. McLeod had expected, nor did he use it as Mr. Richardson had feared. When he read it his spirits rose and, then almost at once, fell again. Knowing his Jane he saw at once that Mrs. McLeod must have written it on her own, without Jane's knowing anything about it. It was just another of those crazy things Mrs. McLeod was always doing. And anyway, even if what Mrs. McLeod wrote was true, he couldn't desert his father now and go over to Jane, not now when the old man had his back to the wall and was looking more and more tired and ill each day. There was, Jimmy saw, no way out but to call off the whole crusade, and that he knew, better than Mrs. McLeod or Mr. Richardson, was now beyond possibility. The ball had started rolling, and nothing would be able to stop fanatics like the Reverend Mr. Simpson and Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins and people like Gashouse Mary who were out to revenge themselves. And Bill Swain who, after years, had found his chance to “get” his rival. You might call off Mrs. McLeod and even perhaps that fellow Richardson who, Jimmy suspected in his heart, wasn't a bad fellow. But the others ... no, there wasn't any hope. He might have gone to his father and taken him at his word and asked him to give up the fight and go away, out of Plattesville, out of the State forever; but he couldn't do that either. It would be as bad as going over to the enemy.

And he was genuinely afraid now of Richardson. If Jane had given him up for good, she might get fond of Richardson, working there in the same office with him every day.

He didn't even answer the letter and he didn't show it to his father or any of the others. He simply tore it up and threw it into the wastepaper basket and went out to Hennessey's saloon to get a drink and play some billiards to get his mind off the whole thing. He told himself that it was all finished, and that he had got what he deserved for ever going around with a nice girl like Jane Baldwin, and getting caught by her. Maybe, he thought gloomily, he *was* shanty Irish. Maybe Fern Hedges *was* his kind of girl.

## 58

In the Flats along the river Gashouse Mary continued her campaign, growing perhaps a little too bold. Everyone—the longshoremen, the people who lived in shacks in the flood districts, the negroes, the urchins—knew her. Wherever she went her progress was marked by greetings and jokes and sometimes by cheers. For Gashouse Mary was a born politician of the old school. At Christmas she sent out fifty baskets full of food into the poor quarter and had a free soup kitchen running all day at the El Dorado dance hall. She helped out discouraged families with small loans and once or twice had saved a home from the clutches of the voracious banks. She had done all this out of the generosity of her heart and the ageless vitality which made her, even as an old woman, the best of company. And she did it because she was well off and hadn't a soul in the world to whom she might leave her money. Despite her talent for politics, she had kept clear of them since establishing herself in Plattesville—until

Mr. Richardson and the *Daily Shield and Banner* began their campaign. Then she plunged, and all her kindness, all her generosity, all her full-bloodedness had its reward. The district along the water front, the region of the down-trodden, was suddenly hers. Even the organization of Old Dougherty availed nothing against her power. Old Dougherty could even pay men five dollars apiece to vote for him but most of them would, she knew, take the money, go to the polls and vote against him, if she told them to. They *knew* Gashouse Mary. She belonged to the good old days, and she had been among them for years. Even in her velvet suit and picture hat she never put on airs; she could exchange rough stories and swear with the worst of them; she was one of them, not like Old Dougherty, one of themselves, who had risen in the world and turned to exploiting them; she had lived too long in the midst of squalor and vice and misery not to be eternally human. And they knew, every man, woman and child throughout the dreary district, that they could count on her.

It was neither a taste for politics nor the zeal of a reformer which moved her now. She was, she knew, in moments which exasperated her, old and sometimes tired, too tired to battle against anything as strong as the Dougherty organization. She was moved rather by a liking for battle and a desire for revenge but, as the campaign progressed, she was moved more and more by her fondness for Mr. Richardson.

He came to see her a couple of times a week, to pick up bits of information and check up on the progress of her part of the campaign. Sometimes they sat at Gashouse Mary's table in the corner of the dance hall near the bar, but more often they retired to the parlor where they sat drinking beer served by Aida's cousin, Minnie. And while they sat there

they talked of a great many things other than business, of Mrs. McLeod and her gentleness, of the old days, of glorious episodes in the past of Mary, of the misery of the river-front district and what was to be done about it.

“Nothing,” Gashouse Mary said. “The Lord was right. The poor ye have ever with ye. There’s nothing to do but make ’em as little miserable as possible.”

And while they sat there Gashouse Mary with half her mind, that part of it which when she was young devoted itself to affairs of the heart, would appraise Mr. Richardson and regret that she was sixty-eight instead of thirty. She liked his clear healthy skin and the clearness of his eye, and that look he always had of having just emerged from the bath. And she liked the broad, powerful shoulders and the warmth that came into his voice when he grew indignant about Old Dougherty and the exploitation of the poor and unfortunate.

“What a fine figure of a man,” she would think with that part of her mind which had always given itself over to what she called “amoor.” “What I could have made of him if I’d only met him thirty or forty years ago.”

She kept seeing him in the funny clothes of fifty years earlier, in the Plattesville of her childhood, heading a committee of vigilantes, a revolver strapped on each hip. With a mustache he would have looked remarkably like J. E. McLeod. But there wasn’t anything to be done about all that now—nothing except to mother him and help him all she could.

Sometimes she asked him about his own life, but she got no further than she had on that first occasion. And once she tried to “pump” him about his feeling toward Jane. To which



he responded, “I like her. She’s a funny little thing, but I’ve got a girl.”

“Where?”

“In the East.”

“The kind of girl you’re gonna marry?” knowing he very likely wouldn’t have any other kind.

“Yes.”

“When?”

“When I get through here and Mrs. McLeod doesn’t need me any more.”

Then one night after Mr. Richardson had taken up his hat and said, “I’ve got to go back to work now,” they went through the passage into the El Dorado dance hall, and as they entered, Gashouse Mary stopped in the doorway and stood staring at two strangers standing at the bar. Turning back, Mr. Richardson waited for her and asked, “What’s the matter?”

She moved out of the doorway and said, “I just thought I saw somebody I knew.”

“Somebody important?” and by “important” she knew he meant someone involved in the campaign on Old Dougherty’s side.

She seated herself at the table and said, “Maybe I was wrong. It’s just a face I thought I knew.” Then out of the side of her mouth she said, “Sit down and have a beer.”

“I’ve got to go now.”

In a fierce voice, filled with authority, she said again, “Sit down and have a beer. Don’t look in that direction.”

Then Mr. Richardson understood and said, “Okay!” and sat down.

They had a beer, and Gashouse Mary said suddenly,  
“Who’s Mr. Hirsh?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Hirsh, I guess.”

“No, he ain’t.”

They were silent, drinking beer for a time. Then she said,  
“Do you know any of the Federal men—G-men, I mean?”

“No, why?”

“It might be a good idea to have them look into Mr. Hirsh.”

A great light dawned in Mr. Richardson’s brain. Until now he hadn’t given any special thought to Mr. Hirsh, except to dislike him after that interview weeks before in the office of Old Dougherty when they had offered him a job. There was decidedly something slimy about Mr. Hirsh, and something sinister as well about the pink cheeks, the too soft hair, the tiny cruel mouth. Mr. Hirsh wasn’t just a roughneck like Old Dougherty; about Mr. Hirsh there was something sinister. He saw him, suddenly, very clearly.

“Why did you ask that?” he said to Mary.

“Just a hunch.”

Then as he finished his beer and lighted a cigarette, she said again, talking out of the side of her mouth, making a whistling noise through her false teeth, “When you go out of here, turn and go along the side of the dance hall till you get to the passage between it and my house. Go in there and you’ll find a cellar door. Hide there and in a little while I’ll come over and let you into the house.”

“What for?”

“Do as I say.”

“Okay.”

Casually, Mr. Richardson rose and went out the front door of the El Dorado. Outside, slipping into the shadow, he followed Gashouse Mary's directions, and in a moment he found himself, feeling sheepish, pressed flat against the cellar door. A moment or two passed and then he heard the door of the dance hall opening, and in the shadow he peeped over the edge of the areaway and saw two men in the glare of the bright lights of the electric sign. They walked to the edge of the sidewalk and stood there for a moment, looking to right and left, with an air of indecision, talking together. He could not hear what they said, and in a moment they turned and hurried up the street toward the town in the direction he would have taken.

At the same moment from behind him, he heard the sound of a key turning in the lock and the low voice of Gashouse Mary coming between her false teeth. "Come in quick. I was right."

Inside she led him up the cellar steps back into the parlor.

By the glare of the big chandelier he saw a new light in Mary's face. She said, "Get out of here quick, before they double back."

"Who?"

"Those two mugs that followed you out. And go home by the back way through Alamo Avenue, and when you get there don't take the front path through those bushes. Go in by the stable. Is it unlocked?"

"I don't know."

"If it isn't, break a window or climb over the fence."

Mr. Richardson lighted a cigarette and asked, "What's all the mystery about?"

“Never mind. I’ve got a hunch.” She took him by the arm. “I’m putting you out the kitchen door. And tomorrow buy yourself a gat.”

He went, following her directions, and broke a window in the deserted stables of McLeod’s Folly and entered the house by the cellar door, waking Aida in her room beside the kitchen. Clad in a kimono covered with enormous flowers and terrified, she unlocked the inside door when she recognized the voice.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “What you all comin’ in this door for?”

“Never mind,” he said, “I was just trying to get home without seeing somebody I didn’t want to talk to.” He placed his hands on her shoulders and said, “Don’t tell Mrs. McLeod anything about it.”

Aida looked at him showing the whites of her eyes. Then she asked, “What you all been up to?”

“I haven’t been up to anything. You go back to bed and get some sleep.”

This time she didn’t answer him. She only relocked the door and muttering to herself thrust out her big enormous lower lip. By now he knew her well enough to know that she was hurt and indignant. The thrust-out lower lip was a prelude to a “misery.” She was angry not because he had wakened her but because he had denied her his confidence.

## 59

A little while after Mr. Richardson left Gashouse Mary’s, just as she had returned to her table, a fight broke out in the corner of the room beyond the jazz band. Nobody seemed to

have started it, but when Jake, the chucker-out, sprang into the middle of it, swinging his great chimpanzee arms, it only spread until half the clients of the establishment were involved. Bottles and glasses flew across the room smashing windows and lights. The jazz band and the hostesses made for the door in a body and suddenly the room was filled with police. They arrested Gashouse Mary and one of the bartenders, and the rest of the crowd were driven from the room, all save four men Gashouse Mary had never seen before.

They put her and the bartender into the patrol wagon, and as it drove off she heard behind her the sound of breaking mirrors and bottles and the smashing of shattered furniture. Grinding her false teeth together, she began to swear. This time they were wrecking the place deliberately. There wouldn't be a stick of furniture left. But somehow Gashouse Mary didn't mind the wreckage. It wasn't the thought of that which made her swear. Her blood was up now. They could burn her house to the ground, but in the end she'd beat them. And in the midst of the fight a bit of knowledge had come to her as if sent by God. She knew suddenly who the men were—one of the two who had stood at the bar and afterward gone out to follow Mr. Richardson. Out of the past, the knowledge had come to her. It was Pugface Mahoney. He had dyed his hair and grown a mustache, but it was Pugface Mahoney just the same. She couldn't forget that bashed-in face, the hulking shoulders and the little pig eyes.

She thought, "I'll fix him. Only I've got to see Mr. Richardson. They'll probably try to keep me from seeing him. It won't do any good telling this gang of police about him. He's been hired—he and that other mug—by the

Dougherty gang ... probably he was brought to town by Hirsh, the little rat. Mebbe Old Dougherty doesn't even know anything about it."

It wasn't like Old Dougherty to bring gunmen into a fight like this. She didn't care anything about how much they smashed up the El Dorado. Swaying from side to side in the patrol wagon, she was relishing her knowledge that the Dougherty outfit had made a false move. You could get away with gunmen in a tough Chicago ward but not in a place like Platteville. The people of Platteville, even Dougherty's henchmen, wouldn't stand for it. It was probably that Mr. Hirsh who was responsible. And who in hell was Mr. Hirsh? Gashouse Mary had never seen him before he came to Platteville, but she didn't like the smell of him.

In the morning they charged her with maintaining a public nuisance and held her for trial at twenty-five hundred dollars' bail, and old Flynn wouldn't let her use the El Dorado or her own house as security. Old Dougherty had seen to that. They meant to clap her in jail and keep her there so she couldn't go on taking votes away from him in the district along the water front. She didn't mind the visit to the jail. It wasn't the first time she had been there and, as she reflected with a decent sense of philosophy, it gave her a rest and time to make fresh plans against Old Dougherty and his gang. The only thing which troubled her was how to protect Mr. Richardson against Pugface Mahoney and his sinister accomplice.

She did manage to talk to Harvey Bingham, the police chief. To him she said, "What kind of a town is this getting to be when you bring in hired killers from St. Louis?"

Harvey said he didn't know what she was talking about and she believed him because Harvey wasn't very bright and

no good at all at pretending. So she told him about Pugface Mahoney and gave a light sketch of his sinister and bloody history. When she had finished Harvey looked worried and scratched his head and said, "I don't know how a couple of guys like that got into Plattesville without my knowing it. We keep a pretty close check-up."

"Sure," said Gashouse Mary, "on tramps. But these guys ain't tramps. They're dangerous. You can pass on the word to your boss that if they pull off anything, he's finished. I'm an old timer here and I know what the people of the county are like. They'll stand for a lot of things but not for imported killers."

Harvey Bingham locked her in and went away still scratching his head in bewilderment. He didn't like what old Mary had just told him. Fun was fun, but you could run a good thing into the ground. And he had a wife and eight children to think about, and the thought of the killers in Plattesville made the hair that remained on his bald head rise on end.

## 60

In the morning Mr. Richardson was up early and out of the house before Mrs. McLeod and Jane had their breakfast. He didn't even wait for the postman on the chance of getting a letter with the Boston postmark.

At breakfast Aida had a "misery" and moaned a good deal, but this time Mrs. McLeod wasn't able to cure it because she didn't possess the means; she didn't know anything about Mr. Richardson's midnight return by the cellar stairs. She did notice, however, that Aida's "misery" had a new quality in it which puzzled her. Between moans Aida had an air of

mystery and secret triumph. When at last breakfast was finished Mrs. McLeod said, "Aida, what on earth has got into you this morning?"

Aida answered stubbornly, "Nothin'. Ah got a misery."

"Shall I send for a doctor?"

"It ain't nothin' a doctor can cure."

Then Mrs. McLeod, losing patience, said, "Like as not it's the result of what happened the other night."

At this thrust the dark Aida would have blushed if she had been able. Nobody in the household had mentioned her going amok. Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson had simply put her to bed and the next morning behaved as if nothing had happened.

"It ain't got nothin' to do with that." Then she turned suddenly and said darkly, "I doan know what's come over this house." And resentfully she added, "I guess it must be that crazy Mr. Richardson, I ain't never see anybody like him."

## 61

Meanwhile Mr. Richardson had gone to the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, where he set the paper on its way for the day. Then he wrote a note to Mrs. McLeod saying he had several things to do and might not return until noon. When he had left this on her desk in the cubbyhole he went out, and crossing the Square, entered the office of the First National Bank of Platteville. The office was only just open and the cashier hadn't yet arrived, so he had to wait for a few moments, impatiently smoking and tapping his foot. While he



sat there the office boy and the scrub woman had a conversation which slowly penetrated his consciousness.

The charwoman said with a rich Polish accent, "Well, they got Gashouse Mary last night."

The office boy said, "How?"

"A lotta bums broke up the place and they took her off to jail."

"What for?"

"For maintainin' a public nuisance." She wrung out her mop and added, "What's a public nuisance?"

"I guess it's what you call makin' trouble."

"She never made no trouble."

"Where is she now?"

"In jail."

"It's a lousy shame."

Slowly the conversation had filtered its way through the cloud of thoughts and plans that occupied the crusader's brain of Mr. Richardson. Now, suddenly, he listened to every syllable, thinking, "By God, they're a tougher lot than I thought." But the knowledge that there were a couple of mobsters in town probably looking for himself, and that the Dougherty crowd had framed Gashouse Mary, gave him pleasure. Those things meant that they were scared—scared of him and the *Daily Shield and Banner*, and the Reform Committee and the votes which, somehow or other, Gashouse Mary could control. It was the first definite sign that they were on the run. Like Gashouse Mary, he suspected Mr. Hirsh rather than Old Dougherty. And while he sat listening a new idea came to him.

Then the cashier came out to receive him, a thing which he had not expected. He was a plump little man with horn-rimmed spectacles. He said, "Glad to see you, Mr. Richardson. The telegram came all right. I've got the money. How would you like it?"

"Twelve thousand in thousand dollar notes and the rest in hundreds."

"The weather we're having! Just sit down, I'll have it for you in a moment. A great job you're doing with the *Daily Shield and Banner*. You must seem like a godsend to Mrs. McLeod."

"It wasn't God that sent me, she picked me up out of jail."

The cashier laughed with a shade of nervousness in his voice. "Yes," he said, "I heard all about that story. Ha! Ha!"

Then the cashier handed him the money in an envelope and he thrust it into his inside pocket.

"Thanks," said Mr. Richardson.

"That's all right. It's a pleasure. Any time we can oblige you. By the way, I've joined the Reform Legion. About everybody here in the office belongs."

"That's fine. Thanks again."

Then he went out thinking what a difference fifteen thousand dollars telegraphed from the First National Bank of New York City could make in the attitude of a bank cashier in a small town. Four months ago, if he had walked in as Mrs. McLeod found him beside the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Fountain, he'd probably have been thrown out.

From the bank he went directly to the telegraph office and there he wrote one telegram to the headquarters of the Federal police in Omaha. It read: "Have hot tip on bad

proposition. Communicate T. R. Richardson, *Daily Shield and Banner*, Plattessville.” But the name signed to it was not “T. R. Richardson.”

A second telegram he addressed to the Canadian-American Paper Corporation. It simply read: “Guarantee unlimited credit Lavinia McLeod, Plattessville *Daily Shield and Banner*.” Again it was signed by the name, half of which Jane had read through the damaged envelope with the Boston postmark. As he left the telegraph office the square jaw was a little squarer and the steel gray-blue eyes a little more steely.

Crossing the Square he went directly to the Ranchers’ Bank in the Dougherty Block where after ten minutes’ wait he was received by the president, with a good deal less warmth than the cashier of the First National had shown him. The interview didn’t last very long. Mr. Richardson took the envelope containing fifteen thousand dollars in cash and laid it on the mahogany table, and in a little while he left the office with the mortgage of McLeod’s Folly and something over three thousand dollars in his pocket.

From the Ranchers’ Bank he went to the office of C. M. Landon, attorney-at-law. Mr. Landon was a lean, cadaverous and pious man, not the type which Mr. Richardson liked, but he was a smart lawyer and he was a member of the Reform Committee, and both these things, Mr. Richardson had need of at the moment.

For half an hour they talked together, Mr. Richardson explaining what had happened to Gashouse Mary and how they must get her out at once. Mr. C. M. Landon, who was, as well as being a smart lawyer, an elder in the First Baptist Church, did not approve of Mary and wasn’t sure that she and the town wouldn’t both be better off if she stayed in jail. It

took nearly twenty minutes to persuade him, but in the end he took down his hat and led by Mr. Richardson went to the magistrate's court.

## 62

Old Flynn, the magistrate, wasn't pleased at the sight of Mr. Richardson and the Baptist lawyer. From the moment he saw them come in quietly and sit down at the back of the courtroom, he couldn't keep his mind on the cases which came before him. In the mind of the magistrate the two were not simply a pair of citizens come to watch the proceedings of the court; they were birds of evil omen. And because he, like the rest of the Dougherty gang, was a little scared, they made him nervous. He had, it must be said, quite a lot on his conscience, and the presence of the leader of the crusade and one of the Reform Committee did not bring peace to his mind.

Worst of all there was the business of Gashouse Mary's bail. He was aware that he had overstepped legal bounds in denying Mary the right to furnish bail for herself, and he knew that C. M. Landon, however pious he might be, was a good lawyer and hard as the calloused sole of a stevedore's bare foot. People like that pair in the back of the courtroom upset him. Crooks he knew you could always deal with; a crook always had a price. But these two cranks! Fanatics, like madmen, were unpredictable. "Goddam it!" he thought, "why did I ever listen to Vinnie McLeod and let that bastard out on parole?" In the end, he had himself been responsible for the crusade which had upset the whole town and now threatened to wreck the machine they had built up so carefully, the machine which was so profitable to all of them. If he hadn't

been a damned fool, that fellow Richardson would have been emptying garbage cans instead of stirring up trouble. It wasn't as if W. M. hadn't thrown it in his face twenty times since that opening salvo of the *Daily Shield and Banner*.

"Dismissed," he heard himself saying to the stevedore arraigned before him. "Next case."

And it boded no good that C. M. Landon himself had come to get Gashouse Mary out of jail. It meant that the whole town, good and bad elements, were uniting against the gang. Gashouse Mary and the Baptist elder were strange bedfellows.

And he was troubled too by the bit of news Harvey Bingham had told him just before he opened court ... that there were a couple of gunmen in town. Who had brought them to town old Flynn didn't know, but he had a pretty fair idea.

As the last case was disposed of, he saw Mr. Richardson and C. M. Landon rise and come toward him. He knew what they were going to say and they said it.

Richardson, taking out two one-thousand and five hundred-dollar bills, laid them before him and said, "We've come to bail out Mary."

There wasn't anything to be done but accept the bail and go through the formalities as if there was nothing unusual about the case. When they had been concluded, Elder Landon, with a look of an uncompromising Old Testament prophet, said in a voice of ice, "We might as well tell you that if Mary is convicted, the case will be appealed. If necessary, it will go to the Supreme Court of the United States."

And old Flynn, who for years had been bullying helpless and unfortunate prisoners, took it meekly. He only said, "The

law must take its course.”

“See that it does,” said Elder Landon. “This case is going to be an issue.” Then he and Mr. Richardson said, “Good morning,” and walked out of the court, leaving a troubled magistrate wondering what they had up their sleeves that made them so sure of themselves.

## 63

No sooner had the doors of the city prison closed behind Gashouse Mary than she told Mr. Richardson and C. M. Landon all about Pugface Mahoney and his traveling mate. She knew pretty nearly everything there was to know about a mobster with a long record in river towns, and she spared no detail in the account she gave to Mr. Richardson and the startled Baptist elder.

When she had finished, his face was white and set. “It’s an outrage!” he said in his icy voice. “Bringing gangsters to Platteville. Something has got to be done about it.”

“Go and see the chief of police,” said Mr. Richardson. And away went Mr. Landon to the police station, his lean legs flying, the tails of his Prince Albert flapping about his bony knees.

Back in the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, Mr. Richardson went into Mrs. McLeod’s cubbyhole, closed the door and handed her the canceled mortgage.

Her astonishment was so great that she could only stand there with the mortgage in her thin trembling hand, saying, “What’s this?”

“It’s the mortgage,” said Mr. Richardson, “it’s canceled.”

“But how?” she asked.

“Never mind. I took care of it.”

“But how?” Bewilderment blurred her features. “How could you do that?”

“Never mind,” said Mr. Richardson, “I’ll explain it all later. I’ve got plenty to write just now.” And he left her standing there with the mortgage.

When he had gone, she examined it carefully, not that she would know anything about such things but because, mechanically, it seemed the thing to do. So far as she could see the mortgage was canceled: she was free of it, and suddenly for an instant, she felt happy and light as air, like a drowning woman from whose neck a millstone had been removed. And then the happiness left her, succeeded by alarm—alarm, oddly enough, over no threat nor any evil that was being done her, but over the magical quality of Mr. Richardson’s intercession in the stream of her humdrum life. Who was he really? Why should he do so much for her? How dared she, a McLeod, accept so much from a stranger? Was she right to accept it? What would J. E. have said?

But when a little later he came into the cubbyhole and she said to him, “I can’t allow you to go on doing things for me—things like this mortgage,” he only replied, “We haven’t time to argue about things like that now. And don’t be too sure that I’m doing it for you. I’m doing it for myself too. Let it go at that. Maybe some day you’ll understand.”

His young face, was very stern and for the first time there was a shadow of impatience in his voice. It seemed to her that he was almost cross, and she felt suddenly very feminine and helpless and bewildered.

Then he said, “You needn’t worry about the paper bill, I’ve fixed that too.” He touched her shoulder, gently, with an

affection that surprised her. “Don’t you worry. Just get on with your work. The Torchlight Procession Committee is meeting here as soon as the paper’s gone to press, and I’ve got plenty to do before then.”

She didn’t know about Pugface Mahoney and his friend until Myrtle Ferguson came up about five o’clock bearing the first copy of the current edition. There, on the front page, with great headlines was the whole story—THUGS IMPORTED INTO PLATTESVILLE. LATEST NOVELTY INTRODUCED BY CORRUPT ELEMENT.

The story was admirably written. It related the destruction of the El Dorado dance pavilion, the arrest and charges against Gashouse Mary, and the presence in the dance hall of two well-known gangsters, both disguised but recognized none the less by witnesses who had known them before. It even gave their names—Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie alias Herman Rizzio. The last name was a guess, a shrewd and lucky one on the part of Gashouse Mary: she knew the pair had worked together before in New Orleans and Memphis. The police, continued the article, had been warned of the presence of the killers in Plattesville, but they had not been found, and no great coöperation, the *Daily Shield and Banner* pointed out, was to be expected from a police force so dominated by the corrupt element in Plattesville. Until now, Mr. Richardson wrote, Plattesville had been free of the underworld element: it seemed that the enemies of law and order were prepared to stop at nothing. The presence of Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie was an insult to every citizen of Plattesville.

As Mrs. McLeod read the story, cold thrills of terror ran up and down her spine. To Mr. Richardson she said, “Why didn’t



you tell me?”

“I didn’t want to worry you.”

“Now I won’t be able to sleep a wink.”

“They won’t bother you.”

“It isn’t myself I’m thinking about. It’s you.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ve been through this before.”

“You ought to have a bodyguard.”

Mr. Richardson grinned, “It’s not as bad as that.” He patted her shoulder. “I can take care of myself.”

But when he left the cubbyhole he found a bodyguard waiting for him. He stood in the doorway, his hat in his hand, rocking back and forth a little on his feet, his huge hands hanging down to his knees, for all the world like an orang-utan. It was Jake—Gashouse Mary’s chucker-out.

The bouncer, grinning, handed Mr. Richardson a note written on Gashouse Mary’s blue and gold stationery. It simply said that she was sending Jake as a bodyguard. She had instructed him to go everywhere with Mr. Richardson, even to McLeod’s Folly to sleep outside his bedroom door.

“You can count on Jake,” she wrote. “He’s got a gat and he’s pretty quick on the draw. I’ve told him never to leave your side and as he’s not quite bright you won’t be able to shake him even if you want to. But don’t try to with those two bastards in town. I know what I’m talking about.”

Grinning, Mr. Richardson tore up the note and said to Jake, “Here, sit down here.” And Jake, with his great hands holding his cap between his knees, sat down grinning. From that moment he never left Mr. Richardson’s side. When he rose from his desk, Jake rose too. When he went into the composing room or downstairs to see Myrtle, Jake went with

him. He went even to the lavatory to wait outside like a faithful bloodhound.

From his corner, Willie Ferguson regarded Jake with awe and considered getting himself a bodyguard. For a long time Willie had been growing more and more nervous, and now the news that there were gunmen in the town made him resort more and more frequently to the bottom drawer for the bottled strength and courage which had never failed him. And Jane, from her desk, looked on, excited and a little impressed by the growing importance of the stranger, Mr. Richardson, a little thrilled by the presence of the gorilla Jake who had come up out of the exciting life along the river front about which she knew nothing at all.

## 64

At six o'clock, the editorial room began to fill up with the members of the Torchlight Procession Committee. The Reverend Mr. Simpson was there and Elder C. M. Landon, grim as ever and a little more triumphant, and Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, and Jim Newman and several of the boys and Gashouse Mary, and Aida's cousin, Athena's boy, the poet, with Joe from Joe's Place. It was an impressive gathering because it included representatives from almost every element in Plattesville, and it was evident that half the committee—people like Joe of Joe's Place and Gashouse Mary and Jim Newman and the boys—were there not so much out of a desire to make Plattesville a moral paradise as because they had had enough of the rule of Old Dougherty and his gang.

The crusade, clearly, was taking care of itself. It was sweeping along now on its own impetus. It had perhaps

gotten out of hand and was reaching a state beyond control. It was the kind of thing which couldn't have happened in the East. What Gashouse Mary said in the beginning was true: Platteville and Calamos County liked a political fight and a good political fight had been long overdue.

## 65

At about the same hour, a troubled group assembled in the office of the *Daily News*. Old Dougherty was there, and Police Magistrate Flynn, and Harvey Bingham, and Mr. Winterbottom, and Mr. Hirsh, and a handful of less important members of the gang. Only Jimmy Dougherty was absent.

The group had been brought together by the story in the *Daily Shield and Banner* of the presence in town of Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie, for Old Dougherty, with his old political shrewdness, had seen at once the damage that story did to his position. It was one more step in Richardson's campaign to make him seem an outsider, a crook who had come to prey upon the people of Platteville, who imported gangster methods into a quiet, respectable city of the Southwest.

The only trouble was that nobody at the conference had seen the two killers, and nobody seemed to be able to lay hands on them.

Harvey Bingham, trembling a little, and accompanied by two fellow policemen, had spent the day searching dives, brothels and cheap hotels, pounding on doors with a drawn pistol in hand, only to discover when the doors were opened, familiar bad characters of Platteville whom he already knew all too well. Old Flynn was noncommittal: he hadn't seen the gangsters, but he was too hardened and experienced to

believe that things did not exist simply because he had not seen them. Old Dougherty himself was puzzled, like a bull which has been played by bullfighters too long. He chewed a cigar and glared and rolled his big grizzled head from side to side. The thing—the whole goddamned crusade—was getting out of hand. He had never believed it could happen. He hadn't believed that the West and the East could be so different, that the people of Platteville would behave so differently from the people of South Boston or Chicago.

The timid Mr. Winterbottom was simply terrified, and Mr. Hirsh, the guinea pig, wore his rat expression and said that it was his opinion that the whole story had been made up by the *Daily Shield and Banner* and that there wasn't any such persons as Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie.

At this Old Dougherty grumbled and roared and said, "If they are here I don't see who brought them here or what they're doing." Then irritably he turned to Harvey Bingham and old Flynn, "It's up to you to find 'em and run 'em out of town. Their bein' here ain't doin' us any good." He had a suspicion who had brought them to Platteville and moved by that suspicion he glanced at Mr. Hirsh; but the little pale blue rat's eyes set in the pink face betrayed nothing whatever.

For a long time they talked round and round in circles, getting nowhere. Old Dougherty kept looking at his watch, wondering why Jimmy hadn't turned up yet, wishing he were there to help—not that he had been of much use lately, moping around as if he washed his hands of the whole affair—he just wanted to have him there in the room. It made him feel less lonely. And the old man was troubled because of a bit of news that had come to him by long-distance telephone from the State capital. It came from one of his henchmen, the

district representative, who had been doing some investigating of his own. He had found out a lot of things, not very pleasant things, but the worst was that Bill Swain and his gang were planning to make the Plattessville investigation a State affair. They were going to place the whole thing beyond the reach of the judges over whom Old Dougherty had control. They were going to make it a criminal affair. That was another reason why Old Dougherty didn't like the mysterious presence of Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie in Plattessville.

And while he sat reflecting grimly on the development of the crusade in the last few hours and listening with only half his mind to the whinings of Mr. Winterbottom, the door suddenly opened and Jimmy came in. It didn't open normally and simply, the door; it was flung open. And the Jimmy who came in wasn't the moping, listless Jimmy of the past three or four weeks; it was a Jimmy whose good-looking face was flushed, whose blue eyes shot fire. Slamming the door behind him, he said, "What are those two gangsters doing in Plattessville?"

For a moment there was silence and then Old Dougherty answered, "We don't know. That's what we want to find out."

"Well, the other outfit didn't bring them here."

Mr. Hirsh, the rat-faced, said smoothly, "How d'you know they didn't? Gashouse Mary seems to know about 'em."

Jimmy turned to him and pounded on the table. "Because I've just been talking to Gashouse Mary. I've got a damned good idea who brought them here. And they're gonna scam. Goddamned quick!" He threatened Mr. Hirsh across the table. "Get me? They're gonna scam!" Then turning to the others he said, "I'm going to fight. I'm ready to fight now. But I'm

not going to have guys like that fighting on my side. It's cost us plenty already. That kind of thing can lick us." Again he turned to Hirsh and asked, "Where are they now?"

Blandly Mr. Hirsh replied, "I don't know. I don't know anything about them."

"Well, you'd better find out." To Harvey Bingham he said, "You'd better shake your tail too. And you're going to send a couple of cops to guard the *Daily Shield and Banner* office as long as those two rats are in town."

Mr. Hirsh said sweetly, "I don't know what I can do about it. I don't know anything about them."

Leaning back in his chair Old Dougherty watched Jimmy with a new light in his eye. This was *his* Jimmy. This was a real Dougherty with Irish fight in him. The listlessness and despair went suddenly out of him.

Then Jimmy turned to the old man and said, "Come on, let's get out of here and make some sense." To the others he said, "And you'd better get busy running those two mugs out of town."

It was what Old Dougherty had wanted. He'd known all along that the cards were stacked against him in the fight and he knew that nearly every move they had made had been stupid and ill-timed, but somehow he hadn't been able to pull himself up and think and fight with any sense or spirit. Perhaps he'd had power for too long, or perhaps he was getting old. And now Jimmy had smashed open the door, come into the room and saved the day—a Jimmy who was reborn, a Jimmy who was what he'd always hoped Jimmy would be. Quietly he rose and followed Jimmy out the door, leaving behind them the chief of police, the police magistrate and Mr. Winterbottom bewildered and shaken, and Mr. Hirsh,

the rat-faced, feeling smug and sure of himself, much too sure to be safe.

In the hallway outside Old Dougherty put a delighted arm about Jimmy's shoulder and said, "What's got into you, boy?"

Jimmy lighted a cigarette and threw away the match with a gesture of violence. "I'm sick of you being the goat for a lot of half-wits and small-town crooks," he said. "We're going to fight now, but not the way that shrimp Winterbottom and that crook Hirsh fight. Plattesville's a good town and it's our town too as much as anybody else's. I've lived here all my life. There's no reason why there shouldn't be a good strong Democratic organization but not the kind of a one that guys like Hirsh and old Flynn want. You can't get away with Hirsh's methods in a town like this. Come on, you and I are going to eat out at Millersville and make some sense."

Chuckling, the old man followed his son down the stairs. As they got into the car and Jimmy drove off, Jimmy said, "And that was a dumb idea, shaking down Gashouse Mary and breaking up her joint. Who the hell had that idea?"

"It was old Flynn," said his father.

"Better drop him overboard. We've got to change all our tactics and take up a new line. We've got to get rid of old Flynn and that bastard Hirsh and maybe even that nitwit, Winterbottom."

"That's what I've been waiting for," said Old Dougherty, "and you're the boy to do it." There was a grin on his face, a grin of delight at the change in Jimmy. He didn't even mind the seventy miles an hour the olive-green roadster was making along the Millersville Pike. But in his heart he wasn't at all sure that the change in tactics wouldn't come too late.

He wasn't at all sure that the jig wasn't already up. But he betrayed not so much as a hint of this to Jimmy. He couldn't throw cold water on the boy's fighting spirit now.

## 66

It might not have been too late for the leopard to change his spots; throwing overboard old Flynn and Hirsh might have made a difference because the personal following of Old Dougherty was big enough in the town and all of Plattesville liked Jimmy Dougherty: it might even have been that Bill Swain would have changed his course and called off his plan to bring criminal charges against Old Dougherty. Indeed, the whole story might have been different but for what happened during the next twenty-four hours.

Mr. Richardson worked late at the office that night, long after Mrs. McLeod and Jane and Willie had left. Save for himself and Jake, the whole place was empty, the rattling linotype in the back room and the rumbling press belowstairs silent now that the day's work was finished. He wrote a letter to Bill Swain and one to the agent in New York who was handling Mrs. McLeod's book and one to the Canadian-American Paper Company confirming his telegram of the early morning. And all the while just beside him at his elbow sat Jake, the bodyguard, his face as empty as a vacuum, fashioning toys out of bits of cardboard and paper clips with his giant chimpanzee's hands, the big old-fashioned six-shooter beside him on the corner of Jane's desk.

When he had finished writing his letters Mr. Richardson went to work fashioning fresh editorials, making notes, outlining new angles of attack for the following day. The *Daily Shield and Banner* would appear three or four hours



before the Torchlight Parade and that particular issue must be good and strong in order to rally the whole town to the procession.

He had been working for about an hour when there was a knock at the door and he turned and said "Come in." At the sound of the knock, Jake dropped his toys, picked up the six-shooter and covered the door. It opened slowly and there came into the room, not Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie, but a middle-aged woman neither of them had ever seen before.

She was a raw-boned female, with a tired gray skin, a hard mouth and a grim expression about the eyes. She wore a suit of black that was worn and shiny with a moth-eaten collar of skunk fur. At sight of them she said to Jake, "Put down that gun," and as Mr. Richardson rose she came toward him and said, "I suppose you're Mr. Richardson?"

"Yes."

"So you're the young man who's stirred up so much trouble?"

Mr. Richardson grinned and said, "I suppose."

"Well, I'm Mrs. Homer Winterbottom, wife of the editor of the *News*."

They shook hands and Mr. Richardson said, "Won't you sit down, Mrs. Winterbottom?" and to Jake he said, "Put away that gun—out of sight, Jake."

As she sat down he divined that despite the weather-beaten warhorse exterior, Mrs. Winterbottom was nervous about something. There was an odd shyness about her and as she sat down she clasped the big hands covered with shabby gloves tightly together over the shabby handbag she carried.

Then she said, "I suppose you're surprised to see me here?"

"I'm pleased to see you," said Mr. Richardson.

"Are we alone?" She looked nervously over her shoulder and then at Jake.

"You needn't worry about Jake."

"I'd rather have him go away. What I want to say is very private."

Mr. Richardson grinned. "All right," and turning to Jake, he said, "You go and keep guard outside the door, Jake. Somebody might come up the stairs and into the room before we knew it. If you're at the top of the stairs you can pot them right off."

Shaking his head, Jake rose clumsily and obeyed him, and when the door had shut behind him, Mrs. Winterbottom drew her chair nearer to Mr. Richardson and after a preliminary gulp, said, "It's about the *News* and W. M. Dougherty. I've got a lot I want to tell you. Maybe you think it's funny—me coming here to double-cross the old man—but it isn't. He's been starving Homer and me and the children for nearly ten years now, and he treats Homer like he was dirt under his feet. And Homer's a good editor. He's smart and able, but W. M. Dougherty has ruined him. He hasn't got any future left."

She waited to see what Mr. Richardson would say, but he couldn't, it seemed, think of anything better to say than, "I didn't know anything about that. I couldn't very well know."

"Nobody could. Nobody does," said Mrs. Winterbottom, clasping the worn handbag with greater passion. "Everybody thinks that Homer has a good job and I ought to be thankful ... nobody knows how W. M. has underpaid Homer and

tortured him ... yes, tortured him for years. Homer is a sensitive man. Tonight he came home down in the mouth, discouraged, and said he guessed he'd have to quit because he couldn't stand it any longer. It's worse than it used to be on account of that man Hirsh. Ever since he's come into the *News* office he's tortured Homer too." She paused and looked down at her handbag and Mr. Richardson saw that it was because there were tears in her eyes. "We've got eight children we've got to think about. A newspaperman oughtn't to have any children at all."

Then she looked at him again as if wondering whether she dared to go on. Suddenly she plunged, "I've got a lot of information for you and tips about more information. There's a lot of stuff W. M. couldn't keep Homer from knowing about, so I just sat down tonight when Homer went out and wrote it all down." She opened her handbag and took out a paper covered with big emotional writing. "Homer doesn't know I'm here. He doesn't know anything about it. And I don't want anybody to know."

"Of course not," said Mr. Richardson, "I'll never tell anybody. You can trust me."

"Maybe it'll help you and Bill Swain. It's about time this place got cleaned up. And I guess Homer and me won't be any worse off, now that Homer's made up his mind to quit."

Mr. Richardson waited, looking embarrassed, and she said, "I know all about the scandal of the Halstead Street sewer, and about the shakedown of those houses on Franklin Street and plenty more. Old W. M. made Homer help him sometimes with his dirty work. And there's plenty more—enough to send old W. M. to jail."

Then she laid the papers on the table and while Mr. Richardson listened and made notes rapidly, she poured out all she knew of the workings of the Dougherty machine in Plattesville. The account came out in a torrent, driven by the pressure of ten years of resentment and suffering. A good deal of it Mr. Richardson already knew, but there was a lot more that he didn't know. The difficulty was to bring order out of the flood of memories, hints and accusations. A dozen times he had to stop her to ask, "When did that happen?" or "Who was in on that?"

As she talked the grimness went out of her face. It was as if the outpouring came as a relief, as if the passion and resentment of years had finally shattered the dam which held them in and brought release at last. At the end of an hour she finished, saying abruptly, "That's all. If I think of anything else I'll let you know, somehow."

"Thank you, Mrs. Winterbottom," said Mr. Richardson. "What you've told me is very valuable."

"You can use it all. Only you mustn't tell where it came from."

"You can trust me."

She rose, timid once more but at the same time aggressive, and said, "I'll go now. I've got to be home before Homer gets there. He went out to Hennessey's saloon and I guess he'll get himself pretty drunk. I didn't mind tonight. He had a good bust coming to him."

He got up and went with her as far as the top of the stairs, where Jake stood slouched against the wall. He watched her descend and watched her peer into the Square cautiously before stepping into the light. Then he turned and said, "Well, Jake, I guess we'll go home now," and returning to the office

he gathered up the notes, put them into a dispatch case, turned out the lights and locking the door, set off across the Square with Jake at his heels like a faithful Great Dane.

## 67

The shaggy lilacs and syringas bordering the path that led up to McLeod's Folly made an ideal ambush. And Mr. Richardson and Jake were potentially perfect victims for an ambush, the one absorbed profoundly in his plans for the crisis of the campaign, the other slouching along at his side like some friendly jungle animal. Jake wasn't exactly an intellectual companion nor had he any genius for stimulating conversation, so on the way from the *Daily Shield and Banner* office to McLeod's Folly they walked side by side in silence.

Once Mr. Richardson said, "You might as well go home and sleep in your own bed, Jake. Nothing's going to happen to me." But Jake was not to be persuaded. "Mis' McGovern told me I was to stick to you like flypaper," he said, "and that's the way I'm gonna stick."

When they turned in at the rickety gate, Jake, moved by some animal instinct, drew his six-shooter out of its holster and held it ready. The sight of the old-fashioned revolver shining in the light from the street lamp caused Mr. Richardson to hesitate for an instant; perhaps the thought occurred to him that after all it might have been wiser to come in by the window of the deserted stable and the cellar door. Then he laughed and said, "Come on, Jake."

Jake advanced first, boldly, with the six-shooter held in front of him. Mr. Richardson followed, the grin on his face hidden by the darkness. As they reached the bottom of the

high steps leading up to the door Mr. Richardson laughed and said, “You see, Jake. There wasn’t any danger.”

But at the same moment came the muffled roar made by a modern—a very modern—gun. Mr. Richardson’s hat flew off his head, and as if the impetus of the bullet had carried him forward, he shot up the steps and into the house. At the same moment Jake ducked and took refuge in an angle of the high stoop and from there he waited for a moment watching the flash which came from the bushes as the sawed-off shot-gun, or rather both the shot-guns, fired in the direction of Mr. Richardson’s heels. Then carefully he pointed his old cannon at the spot in the lilacs where the flashes appeared. Five times he fired carefully and deliberately and at the fourth shot there was a yell followed by silence. The sixth shot Jake kept in reserve.

For perhaps three minutes there was silence and then, emerging cautiously, he reached the foot of the steps and dashed into the house. Inside in the hall Mr. Richardson was seated on the settee, looking a little dazed and wiping the blood from his head with a handkerchief. Mrs. McLeod, in an old dressing gown, her hair hanging about her tired face, stood over him crying and wringing her hands and saying, “I knew it would happen. I knew it would happen. Are you all right?”

“I’m all right,” said Mr. Richardson, “it’s nothing.”

Then, wailing, Aida appeared and Mrs. McLeod said, “Go fetch some hot water and cloths.”

Jane wasn’t there because she was already on the telephone calling the police, a Jane suddenly full of decision, in whom all the fighting blood of the McLeods had suddenly been roused. When she got through to the police station, she said

in a voice filled with authority, "Get a couple of police up to McLeod's Folly right away! And no damned nonsense either! A man's been shot and there's gangsters on the place!"

When she returned to the hall she found Mrs. McLeod and Aida bending over Mr. Richardson, dabbing nervously at the spot where the slug which had taken his hat off had cut the scalp. She saw at once that her Aunt Vinnie's hand was too unsteady to be of any use and that Aida wasn't much good as she only kept on howling and wailing, so she said, "Here, let me do it," and taking the bowl of water from Aida and the cloth from Mrs. McLeod she said to Aida, "Go and get the iodine out of the bathroom and bring the whisky."

## 68

By the time the police arrived Mr. Richardson was on his feet again, his head bound up in a bit of torn sheet, none the worse save for a slight headache. It was Mrs. McLeod who had given way. Lying back in one of J. E.'s leather chairs, she was having Bourbon poured between her colorless lips by Jane. Aida wasn't moaning any more. She had pulled herself together and was in a good jungle rage, not one of her sulking rages, but a wild one which found an outlet and a relief at the moment Jake opened the door upon Harvey Bingham and two policemen. At sight of them she cried, "A fine set of police you all is ... lettin' a man like Mr. Richardson get shot at! A fine set of lazy tramps!"

Nobody could get in a word until her beloved Mr. Richardson bade her be quiet. She would do anything Mr. Richardson said, especially now when it was Mr. Richardson, the martyr, his head inclosed in a blood-stained bandage who spoke. She stopped shrieking but did not remain altogether

silent. From a point behind Mrs. McLeod's chair she continued to grumble and mutter, glowering at Harvey Bingham like a voodoo witch.

As for Mr. Bingham, the chief of police, he looked sleepy, bewildered and scared. Vaguely, he was aware that all this was going to react upon him, the whole weight of it would come on his head, not only the disapproval of the whole town but the fury of Old Dougherty and Jimmy as well because he hadn't caught the two gunmen and he hadn't sent a couple of policemen to guard Mr. Richardson and the *Daily Shield and Banner* office. Standing there, upset by the spectacle of Mrs. McLeod's hysteria and Aida's witchlike muttering, Police Chief Bingham knew that in this affair there had to be a goat, and he knew too that he was it. Nothing could save him now: he had lost out with both sides. And the spectacle of the smart Mr. Richardson with his head wound about with a bandage so big that he seemed to be wearing a turban, only increased his alarm. The grin on Mr. Richardson's face made his blood run cold.

There wasn't anything to do now but to put on an air of authority, and when Harvey Bingham assumed authority he became pompous. His face bright red with alarm and confusion, he drew himself up and said to the two policemen, "Go and search the bushes. I'll take charge of the investigating here."

The two policemen—one of them had gloated over Mr. Richardson on that day, long ago, when he was arrested—appeared to have no great desire to "search the bushes." One of them suggested that it would be much easier to search the bushes by daylight, but this did him no good because Police Chief Bingham had what was left of his face to save. Turning



on his uneasy subordinate, the easy-going Harvey Bingham became the incarnation of Scotland Yard, of G-men, of the French Sûreté Générale: in a voice of thunder he said, "You heard my orders! Search the bushes!" And the two policemen, overwhelmed by the dramatic spectacle of their chief's sudden transformation, left the room with drooping spirits. At the door, Jake with his six-shooter joined them.

When they had gone, the pomp went out of the Chief. He could take out his uneasiness and ill-temper on his subordinates, but with the others in the room such tactics were no good, and he knew it. So turning to Mrs. McLeod, he said, "I'm sorry, Vinnie, that this happened. We've been looking all day for those two guys."

It was Jane who answered him, a Jane still fiery and filled with McLeod spirit. "Plattenville's come to a pretty pass," she said, "when a citizen can't even be safe in his own dooryard."

"Oh, we'll catch them all right, Miss Baldwin. Don't you worry. We've telephoned to every town for a hundred miles around to be on the lookout for them."

This time Aida answered him, "And Mr. Richardson mighta been dead and cold by now. It's pretty smart to lock the barn after the horses is all stolen."

Ignoring her, the Chief took out a notebook and pencil and addressed Mr. Richardson, "Now, Mr. Richardson, tell me how it happened."

So Mr. Richardson told them the story, which was simple enough, but before he had finished, Jake appeared in the doorway of the library. The six-shooter was stuck in his belt and he walked into the room with a swagger, swinging his apelike arms. His big mouth was spread to twice its size in a grin which showed his big irregular teeth.

They turned to look at him and he said, “Well, I got one of ’em.”

“What do you mean, Jake?” asked Mr. Richardson.

“I got him right through the haid. They’re a-carryin’ him in here now.”

By the time they had left the library and entered the hall, the two policemen were coming through the front door carrying between them the unconscious form of the man they had found in the tangled lilacs and syringa bushes. They laid the man on the floor of the hall. One of the policemen took off his cap, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and then ran his handkerchief round the circumference of the leather band inside his cap.

“Where’s the telephone?” he said. “I gotta get an ambulance.”

Aida, still muttering, led him to the telephone, and when she returned Mr. Richardson was on his knees beside the unconscious gunman.

“He isn’t dead yet, but you can’t tell how bad the wound is. Can’t do anything about it until a doctor comes.” Then he looked at Police Chief Bingham and said, “I guess if he gets well and can talk, your friend Mr. Hirsh’ll have to clear out of Platteville.”

For a moment the police chief stared at him, and then in a slow-witted gaze a light appeared and he said, “That’s funny. I never thought about that. I never thought about it bein’ Hirsh at the bottom of the thing.” And on the good-natured, easy-going mouth appeared the shadow of a grin.

Aida slapped Jake on the back and said, “You’re a right smart shooter, Jake. It musta been the Angel of de Lawd that

pointed that gun for you.” And once again the wide, shag-toothed prideful grin appeared on Jake’s face.

Then the door opened and Gashouse Mary came in. She was dressed only in high-heeled slippers, a hat and a nightgown with a purple coat thrown over it, and at sight of the little group in the hall she looked straight at Mr. Richardson and said, “You all right? You ain’t hurt much?”

“No,” said Mr. Richardson, “I’m not hurt at all.”

“Minnie heard about it at Joe’s Place. I put on a coat and came right up here.” Then she looked down at the unconscious form of the gunman and said, “That’s him all right ... Pugface Mahoney ... dyeing his hair and mustache couldn’t change that mug.” Then she asked, “Who got him?”

“It was Jake,” said Mr. Richardson, and Mary threw her arms about Jake and kissed him on one cheek and said, “God bless you, Jake!” Then turning to Harvey Bingham she said, “A fine chief of police you are ... arresting me and letting things like that cokey Pugface run loose in Plattesville.” With the toe of one slipper she touched the leg of the unconscious gunman and said to Jake, “Too bad you didn’t kill him.”

“No,” said Mr. Richardson, “he can talk plenty when he comes round.”

The ambulance arrived and the unconscious Pugface was borne away, followed by the two policemen and the chief of police. He was glad to escape the temper of Jane, the scorn of Gashouse Mary, the imprecations of Aida and the gentle look of reproach in the eyes of old Mrs. McLeod. But he felt a little relieved—that guy Richardson had given him a little clue. Dully, he divined that Richardson was right. It must have been Hirsh that brought these two gunmen to

Plattessville. Now, maybe he wouldn't be made the goat after all—at any rate, not the whole goat.

The intern who came with the ambulance unwound the yards of bandage that encircled Mr. Richardson's head, and while Aida, Gashouse Mary and Mrs. McLeod leaned over him with murmurs of concern, had a quick glance at the wound. He said it wasn't anything at all, just to put iodine on it, and the yards of bandage weren't necessary. A bit of cotton and a couple of strips of adhesive tape would serve just as well.

When the intern had gone, Aida said, "I'll make you all some cocoa." But Mr. Richardson said he thought they all deserved something stronger than cocoa and told Aida to go and get the Bourbon and some ice water.

"We'll all have a drink and then get some sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a big day," he said.

"And how!" said Mary. She was triumphant now, for her political sense, like that of Mr. Richardson, understood the full significance of what had happened.

While Aida brought the Bourbon Mrs. McLeod began to cry gently and said, "If I'd ever dreamed of all the trouble it's caused, I'd never have had the crusade."

Mr. Richardson took her hand and patted it. "Don't you worry, it's coming along fine. What happened to me isn't anything. I'd be willing to be shot up a lot worse than I am. It would be worth it. And I guess my gunman friend, even if he died, wouldn't be a great loss to anybody."

"You said it," said Gashouse Mary.

Then Aida appeared and they all drank to the success of the crusade. To Mr. Richardson and Gashouse Mary victory

seemed very near. Mr. Richardson, still trying to reassure Mrs. McLeod, said, "We've got them where we want them now. They'll be fighting among themselves now. They'll try to make the chief of police the goat and he'll turn on Hirsh." He slapped his leg. "Wait'll you see tomorrow's paper."

Then Gashouse Mary bade them good night, and when Mr. Richardson suggested that Jake should see her safely home, she said, "No, I've got a taxi waitin' for me. Jake's gonna stay here and look after you all." And turning to Jake she said, "You can sleep on the hall settee and if that other swine turns up you can plug him too." Waving her hand in a gesture of farewell, she added, "We've got 'em where we want 'em now," and gathering the coat over her pink nightgown, she went out the door and down the worn steps of McLeod's Folly between the ancient ragged lilacs and syringas.

Jane was the first up the big stairway. She went silently and without even troubling to say good night to the others, because she did not dare to speak lest she should burst into tears. The emotion which swept her, like one of the tornado winds which sometimes came down from the hills beyond Millersville and buried Plattesville in dust, was compounded partly of rage and partly of bitter sorrow. Even the rage was not simple; it was directed at Jimmy Dougherty and at herself for ever having liked him or believed in him, and the bitter sorrow arose from the knowledge that Jimmy had made a fool of her.

She had believed in him in spite of everything. She had ignored Aida's hint that you couldn't touch pitch without being defiled. She had held out in the face of Aunt Vinnie's obvious sorrow over her attachment. She had refused, even when her pride had been hurt by the story about Fern Hedges,

to believe anything against him. She had fought against the influence of all the others, against her own better sense, against her own McLeod pride, and all it had brought her was humiliation and disillusionment. Because now she couldn't any longer deceive herself; she couldn't any longer pretend that the Doughertys weren't as black as they were painted.

They had brought gunmen to town to shoot Mr. Richardson. There wasn't any doubt about that. Mr. Richardson was sitting downstairs with a bandage on his head and in the hospital was a real gunman with a bullet through his head. But for luck, Mr. Richardson would be dead now, and after that perhaps they'd have shot poor muddled Aunt Vinnie or tipsy Willie Ferguson or even herself.

In her own room she turned up the light, sat down in an armchair and lighted a cigarette. She couldn't undress or clean her teeth or do anything until she got things straightened out in her mind, because she wasn't sure yet that the whole thing wasn't a nightmare and that she wouldn't wake up and find that it wasn't true at all, that none of it had ever happened.

Things like that couldn't happen in a nice place like Plattsville. Even Old Dougherty couldn't plan such things, and certainly not Jimmy—not the Jimmy whose grin was so pleasant and so devastatingly innocent and disarming, not the Jimmy who had taken her to Millersville and to supper so many times. But it was true. At last, after three cigarettes, she couldn't hope any longer that she'd waken and find that the whole thing was a nightmare. And presently she knew what she would do—the only thing she could do to save her self-

respect, her pride, to make it possible to go on living. She had to write Jimmy a letter and tell him exactly what she thought.

So when she had undressed, thinking all the time what she would say so as not to make a bigger fool of herself, she put on a wrapper and sat down at her desk.

She wanted to address him as “Dear Mr. Dougherty,” but that she knew would sound silly. It might even make him laugh. “Dear Sir” was even worse. For a long time she searched in vain for some mode of address that would convey her feeling of coldness, her disgust and a sense of finality, but everything she tried sounded silly, and in the end she was forced to address him as “Dear Jimmy.” Nothing else was possible.

Once she began writing she wrote rapidly in a big sprawling emotional handwriting that seemed out of all proportion with her diminutive size. She wrote:

Dear Jimmy—I only want to write to say that I never want to hear your name mentioned again. If, by chance, we should ever meet on the street I’d take it as a great favor to me if you’d turn into a doorway so that I wouldn’t have to look at you. That’s the way I feel. A snake or a rat would disgust me much less than the sight of you or your father. After what has happened tonight you both ought to be ridden out of town on a rail. That’s what happened to people like you in the days when my uncle J. E. was alive. I count every hour I ever spent with you as worse than lost.

Jane Baldwin.

Once she read the letter through wondering whether she could improve it and taking up the pen, she added a line beneath her signature. “Until now my heart wasn’t in the

crusade. I never worked for it because of you, but now that I know what you are, I shan't rest until you're driven out of Plattesville."

Placing it in an envelope she addressed it and then put out the lights and got into bed, but for a long time she lay awake suffering from hurt pride, and from the awful knowledge that all the others had been right and that there was nothing left but to admit it. In her misery, there was one consolation: she felt free, free as she had been when she first came back from college to Plattesville.

She was finished with Jimmy Dougherty, and she knew now that even the faint flicker of interest she had felt for Mr. Richardson was nothing at all. She had seen him, his head bleeding, having just escaped death and felt nothing whatever, none of the emotion which clearly had swept Aunt Vinnie and Gashouse Mary and Aida off their feet. They might be in love with their precious, cold-blooded reformer, but she was not. On the contrary, she felt a kind of hatred for him, a little like the hatred of him felt by old Flynn and Old Dougherty. If he had never come to Plattesville everything would have been peaceful and very likely she'd be seeing Jimmy. Everything would have been different. As she finally fell asleep, her last conscious, hazy thought was, "Why in hell did Aunt Vinnie ever get him out of jail?"

## 69

Heat came with the sunrise on the morning of the Torchlight Procession, good, old-fashioned, dusty heat of the sort which had swept the plains of the Southwest since the beginning of time. Along Franklin Street and the river front, negro stevedores collapsed to sleep in the shadow of the big



warehouses. On Main Street, citizens chose to walk on the shady side of the street, and even there the heat reflected from the pavement and the buildings opposite beat like a weight upon their heads. In the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner* the new electric fans buzzed and whirled, stirring the hot air into a semblance of life. Old Jim Newman said he hadn't remembered such a spell of heat in fifty years.

It was good, old-fashioned heat like that which had left horses and children dying on the plains in the days of the land rush, but in spite of it, the sense of excitement continued to grow in Plattesville. In spite of it the Reform Committee worked all day, panting and sweating, collecting banners and costumes, rallying dubious enthusiasts, organizing the different sections of "the monster parade and demonstration" which was to take place in the evening. The preachers of the Methodist and Baptist Churches, Gashouse Mary, Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, Willie Ferguson, Jim Newman and scores of others equally ill-assorted, worked and sweated as if there were no differences of background, education and morals among them.

The news of the attack made by imported gunmen upon Mr. Richardson in the very front yard of McLeod's Folly spread from mouth to mouth with a speed that was astounding. Jake, usually as silent as a mute, went from saloon to saloon drinking and telling the story of his exploit until at two in the afternoon, overcome by liquor and the sense of his success, he lay down on the floor of the back room in Hennessey's and went to sleep. The interns and nurses at the hospital spread the story, and the two policemen who had accompanied Harvey Bingham couldn't resist, despite orders to the contrary, telling their wives. And as the

story spread the wave of disgust and anger and fear rose and spread through all of Plattesville and the county to the very edge of the hills.

Honest citizens asked themselves what Plattesville was coming to. It occurred to them that they were no longer safe in their own houses if hired killers were to be brought into town. Before Homer Winterbottom left for the *News* office his shrewish wife confronted him triumphantly, saying, "You'll be the next. They'll be getting you for knowing too much." A remark which did nothing to stiffen the backbone of her worried, timorous husband.

Every half-hour Mr. Richardson, the scratch on his head covered with a bit of adhesive tape, telephoned the City Hospital to discover whether Pugface Mahoney had recovered consciousness and could talk, but the answer was always the same: he was still unconscious, he might die from Jake's lucky shot, but he was tough and very likely would pull through. But it was clear that Mr. Richardson wanted him to talk now, that very day. Mr. Richardson, despite the heat, became a veritable engine of energy. In his shirt sleeves he sat at his desk writing editorials, answering the telephone, calling the hospital and the Reform Committee headquarters and the police station. It was as if the whole crusade were suddenly placed on his broad shoulders, as if he realised that the crucial moment in the whole campaign was at hand and must not be bungled.

Jane, still angry and hurt, watched him with astonishment, thinking suddenly that it must have been Yankees like him who had started the Abolition Movement, and organized the Underground Railroad and made the Civil War. She couldn't believe that even a McLeod, even J. E. himself, had ever in

such terrible heat displayed such a passion for right against wrong. In fact the spectacle of Mr. Richardson terrified her.

It wasn't only the heat which made Jane herself practically useless all that long day. It was the fact too that she felt empty and drained and bitter, as if nothing in the world mattered any longer or ever again would be of the least importance to her. The letter to Jimmy she had sent by a messenger to make certain that he received it while the fires of indignation still seared her soul. The letter was gone and everything was finished. There was nothing left to do but sit in the heat and stare dully at her desk. She didn't even go out to lunch: she hadn't any appetite and could not summon energy enough to get out of her chair and leave the office.

At three o'clock, she felt a flicker of interest when Harvey Bingham himself called from the police station to say they'd caught the other gunman at a place called Walkers Ford. But Little Hermie couldn't tell them anything either. In fact, he would never talk again. When they stopped him, he had tried to shoot his way out, and the local sheriff had finished him off with a pretty long-distance shot through the head from an old army Winchester. Mr. Richardson's only comment was brief. He said, "Why in hell did they kill him? He's no good to us dead."

When poor Mrs. McLeod heard the news she retired to her cubbyhole and relieved her feelings by a good cry. Since the moment she had come down the stairs of McLeod's Folly to find Mr. Richardson in the hall with blood streaming down his face, she had been as useless as if she had been paralyzed. She couldn't, it seemed to her, think straight about anything: she couldn't give an order, even to Aida. In the middle of the night she had wakened and then lain awake until the hot

dawn filled the room with light. The whole thing, she thought, had gotten beyond her. Once, long ago, when she was young, she might have had the courage and the energy to go through with the fight to the end, but now she was tired and frightened. It seemed to her, in her fretful mood, that it was all her fault for ever having had a wild, crazy dream about cleaning up Plattesville. She didn't even know what a crusade like this one could mean. She thought, "I'm too old. I'm too tired." Gashouse Mary's place wrecked: Jane made miserable with every prospect of becoming an old maid: Mr. Richardson nearly killed a man in the hospital with a bullet in him from Jake's gun, and a hundred other violences, bitternesses and quarrels. Mr. Richardson didn't seem to mind at all. There he was now, outside in the office, working like a beaver, as if Plattesville had meant as much to him as it meant to her, as if Plattesville had been his home, as if he had been a McLeod. She thought again, "I'm nothing but an old fool. I haven't the strength to go on with what I've begun. I'm nothing but an old fool."

It was so odd, too, when all she wanted was to make Plattesville a nice clean town where everybody would be prosperous and kindly and happy and love each other.

## 70

Up until the moment of going to press, Mr. Richardson went on working like a beaver, having new ideas, changing the make-up of the paper, writing new and fierce headlines. The moment had come ... the moment to crush Evil and make Good triumphant forever in Plattesville: this edition of the *Plattesville Daily Shield and Banner* had to be supreme, to surpass even the reforming blasts put out long ago by J. E.

McLeod and his father. It was to be a historic issue, preserved by citizens to show their grandchildren. No loophole must be left open. Attack! Attack! Attack!

At four o'clock the paper went to press. And as the last lot of copy was borne off by old Zimmerman, he relaxed and had a drink with bewildered Willie Ferguson.

And then came fresh disaster.

While they were still drinking, the door of the stairway opened and Jacobi, the pressman, came into the room. Beneath smudges of ink his face was white, and in one hand he held a bar of metal that had once been a tire iron. It was bent nearly double.

Shaking it at them, he said, "Well, this is their latest!"

"What's their latest?" asked Mr. Richardson.

Jacobi waved the tire iron. "Somebody must have got into the pressroom last night and stuck that in the works of the press. When we started it the tire iron damned near tore out the insides of the press."

Richardson, white in the face, said, "Can't we do anything?"

"Nothing," said Jacobi. "The press is all ripped up. It's wrecked."

"The swine!" said Willie Ferguson.

For a moment Mr. Richardson was silent. Then inspiration came. "We've got a hand press, haven't we?"

"Sure."

"Well, we'll get out a special edition on the hand press ... just a single page. We'll give it away in the streets."

"It'll take a hell of a long time to run off a newspaper on the hand press."

“We’ll all work at it,” said Mr. Richardson. “They’ve tried to fix us. We’ll show ’em. We’ll turn it into a weapon. We’ll fix ’em. I’ll write a burning hot story of what’s been done and Zimmerman can set it up and we’ll have it on the streets before the parade begins. It was just what we needed ... something like this. It couldn’t be better ... tell Zimmerman to come here.”

Quickly he went to his desk, and after a pause of a moment or two began furiously typing the copy for the hand press. Old Zimmerman, chewing his tobacco, came back and forth between the composing and editorial rooms, setting up the type almost as fast as Mr. Richardson turned out the copy. In half an hour, it was done. In twenty minutes more the hand press was at work, rolling off the special and historical copy of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. The boys who delivered the *Daily Shield and Banner* were summoned and found other boys to aid them in distributing the edition free everywhere in the city, along the water front, down Main Street, in the suburbs, telling all Plattesville the story of the plot against the *Daily Shield and Banner* on the eve of the Great Torchlight Parade.

The others in the office took turns at the hand press, even Jane, whose eyes took on a faint twinkle of life and of admiration for this fresh exhibition of energy on the part of Mr. Richardson.

A little after seven a messenger brought a letter to Jane and without a word she disappeared with it into the washroom. She knew the handwriting. Her hand shook as she tore it open to read it.

It said:

Dear Jane: You can believe what you damned well please. I can't change that. But I didn't know anything about those gunmen or my father either. May God strike me dead if I'm not telling the truth. It must have been Hirsh's doing. Anyway he's out, but that doesn't mean the fight is finished.

Jimmy.

As she read it she heard the cries of the newsboys shouting the edition run off on the hand press, and as she folded the note and put it into her handbag she knew somehow that in spite of anything Jimmy or his father could do, the fight *was* finished, and suddenly she was happy because she *believed* what Jimmy had written. She knew Jimmy. He was Irish and he was superstitious. He wouldn't take any chances about calling upon God to strike him dead.

## 71

At seven-thirty the Great Torchlight Procession had already begun to form in a large field belonging to Elder Landon on the outskirts of the town not far from the Dougherty mansion on Fleming Avenue. The Reverend Mr. Simpson and Elder Landon took charge assisted by Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins. All three wore across their fronts large white ribbons inscribed with the word MARSHAL in gold letters. Theirs was not an easy task because there were, milling about in the field, several hundred marchers—some in the costume of old-time cowhands, some dressed in white as angels of purity, some in ordinary clothes wearing sandwich boards inscribed with the legends "Clean Up Plattesville" and "Down with Dougherty and His Gang." Others carried gasoline torches and banners. Mixed among

them, adding to the confusion, were fifty or sixty boys of all ages come to see the fun, accompanied by dogs of every race, breed and description, which kept up a din of barking and desultory combat. On the outskirts of the mob, three hot-dog stands, one run by an Italian and two by Greeks, had set up a thriving business.

For nearly an hour the three marshals labored to bring order out of the confusion, and in the end, baffled, they summoned the aid of Jim Newman, who unhitched one of his black hearse horses and climbed on its back to ride in and out among the marchers. In the end it was Jim, with the help of a stentorian voice bestowed on him by nature and a megaphone made of brown paper borrowed from one of the Greek hot-dog men, who transformed the milling mob into a column in which each marcher found his proper place.

At a quarter to nine, torches flaming, banners upraised, the procession started on its way toward the center of the town and the public square.

At the head rode the Reverend Mr. Simpson, mounted with a certain amount of disquietude on an old snowy-backed white horse and wearing a costume assembled out of his long career as a “joiner” of many lodges which made him look like a cross between General Robert E. Lee and a British admiral. Directly behind him marched the Millersville town band complete save for the players of the tuba and the piccolo, both of whom held county jobs for which they were indebted to the Dougherty organization. Behind the band came a battalion of Baptist ladies dressed all in white as angels and singing, “Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War” to the accompaniment of the Millersville band, and close on their heels a delegation from the Plattesville



Federation of Women's Clubs led by Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, clad all in white with a large red cross sewn on the front of her costume just beneath her marshal's insignia. Half the club women carried gasoline torches and the other half large banners bearing such legends as, "What About the Courthouse Roof?"—"Franklin Street Must Be Closed Up"—"Citizens of Plattesville, Raise Your Heads Again and Vote Against Dougherty"—"Who Got the Money for the Elm Street Sewer?"

The third battalion of marchers was badly placed, having got off in the wrong order during the confusion of getting the procession under way. It consisted of a water-front delegation, recruited and organized by Gashouse Mary, made up of stevedores, loafers, roustabouts and patrons of the El Dorado dance hall. It carried more torches and more banners which read variously, "Be Fair to the Working Man"—"Why Should We Work for Old Dougherty?"—"Make Plattesville Fit for Honest Workers"—"What About the Water Works Contract?" Half this battalion was a little drunk and all of it slouched along in a disorderly fashion, singing ribald and bawdy songs against the sound of "Onward Christian Soldiers," played by the Millersville band and sung by the angels one battalion in front of them. Just ahead of the leading club women, Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins grew red with fury and indignation, but it was too late now to alter the position in the procession of the various battalions and she had to march on, her ears confronted by a strange cacophony blend of "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "The St. James' Infirmary Blues." It wasn't until they neared the center of the town that it occurred to Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins that the stevedore battalion followed close on her heels, not

perhaps through any error but by the design of Jim Newman himself.

Behind the stevedores, again perhaps a little too near them, came another contingent of angels in white, this time Methodist angels, headed by the Reverend Mr. Burwash on another white plow horse. And then the Silver Cornet band of the Foresters' Lodge and then a straggling contingent of mixed citizens who, at the last moment, joined the parade because it looked like a good party. These too carried banners and torches. Behind them marched the local troops of Boy and Girl Scouts, and last of all came a delegation from the county headed by Jim Newman, the chairman, who was too fat to ride a horse all the way and was drawn by his own two black hearse horses in an open victoria resurrected from some forgotten rotting stable. Few of the county contingent were under fifty and some of them were in the seventies. They rode cow ponies and wore old chaps, ten-gallon hats and high-heeled boots that had not been seen in the county for fifteen years. Some of them were dressed as Indians, and all of them kept up a yelping and hallooing that was highly disconcerting to the vocal efforts of the Methodist angels just in front. The old cattlemen had gotten out of hand, and flasks of Bourbon were passing back and forth from one pinto pony to another. Sam Henderson was on one of his piebalds, and Hal Pierce brought up the rear with a special attraction which Mr. Richardson and the Committee had not thought of.

From an old suit of Jim Newman they had contrived an effigy stuffed with straw and labeled in enormous letters *W. M. Dougherty*. To this they had attached a lariat, and as they rode they dragged it after them in the dust of the summer

evening, giving it every now and then a sudden jerk to the accompaniment of wild “Yahoos.”

Along the whole length of the procession ran newsboys passing out free copies of the historic hand-press edition of the *Daily Shield and Banner* retailing the iniquitous details of the attack upon Mr. Richardson and the wrecking of the *Daily Shield and Banner* press.

The procession passed through the principal streets and at last swung into Main Street headed for the Square. Here most of the crowd had gathered, and it greeted the Baptist angels headed by the Reverend Mr. Simpson with shouts and cheers which reached a crescendo as the old cattlemen, their ponies rearing and plunging with fear at the torches and war cries of the riders, brought up the rear.

As the procession passed the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, the marchers looked up to the windows where the staff stood in the lighted windows—Mr. Richardson, a grin on his face and Mrs. McLeod, trembling, with tears in her eyes, in the front. As the procession passed, the Reverend Mr. Simpson, the Reverend Mr. Burwash and Mrs. Mabel Urquahart Jenkins all gave smart military salutes. The angels burst afresh into “Onward Christian Soldiers,” the river-front workers cheered and sang “Hinky-Dinky Parley-vous,” and the old cattlemen “Yahooed” louder than ever. None of them noticed that they were saluting and cheering not only Mr. Richardson and Mrs. McLeod but Gashouse Mary, Aida and her cousin Athena’s son, as well. For Gashouse Mary was there, discreetly in the background, enjoying herself enormously. She had a drink of Bourbon with Willie Ferguson, slapped him on the back, to the disapproval of his wife, Myrtle, and said, “I guess this’ll fix ’em.”

And Willie said, “Plattessville ain’t had so much fun since the land rush.” Only Jane didn’t seem to enjoy it. After a time she retired to the back of the editorial room and pretended to be interested in the *New York Times*. In her heart she was frightened. For a long time now, for four or five days, she had been aware of the rising feeling in the town and tonight she was suddenly terrified. What terrified her she did not know except that she felt a sick horror of the parade and the strange foreboding terror of the mob spirit there was in it. She was afraid suddenly for Jimmy and hoped that he had gone to Millersville or some place out of Plattessville till the procession was over. That was what they should have done ... both Jimmy and his father. But in her heart she knew they hadn’t done it. The Doughertys were Irish. They liked a fight. They weren’t going to take anything lying down. Behind the *New York Times* she found herself murmuring a prayer that Jimmy wouldn’t show himself in the street tonight.

## 72

The Doughertys hadn’t gone to Millersville or anywhere else. In the darkened windows of the *Daily News* office they were watching the procession. Old Dougherty was silent, alarmed to the depths of his soul for the first time. He hadn’t expected the demonstration to be a success. He had boasted that it would fizzle out into nothing. But it was being a great success. There was no denying it. And it was being cheered by the townspeople, by people he had thought loyal to him, by people for whom he had done favors.

Behind him, Mr. Hirsh, the guinea pig, was glum and silent. His gangster’s coup with the tire iron had been a failure all round. It had drawn the abuse of Old Dougherty

who told him he was out of a job, and Jimmy who threatened to beat him up, and Richardson had turned the disaster into victory. Behind them all Mr. Winterbottom was trembling, like a member of the court of Louis Sixteenth before the spectacle of a revolutionary mob. In the darkness no one spoke, and as the tail of the procession passed on its first tour of the Square, with the effigy of Old Dougherty dragging behind the old cattlemen in the dust, Jimmy Dougherty turned and went toward the door.

Old Dougherty noticed the departure and called out after him, "Where are you going?"

"Never mind where I'm going."

"Don't make a damned fool of yourself. Don't go down on the street. It ain't safe."

But the only answer was the sound of the door being slammed. The old man got heavily to his feet and started after his son, but by the time he reached the bottom of the stairs, Jimmy had vanished into the crowd and Old Dougherty turned back. He didn't want very much to face the crowd in the street. A woman, one of the girls from Estelle Laverne's house, caught a glimpse of his face in the shadows and shouted, "Beat it, ugly mug!"

Meanwhile Jimmy was pushing his way through the crowd across the street and the little park, toward the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*.

For half an hour he had been standing in the window in the shadow behind his father. He had watched the Baptist and Methodist angels go past and the club women headed by Mabel Urquahart Jenkins, and the water-front delegation and the old cattlemen. He had read by the light of the torches the insulting legends on the banners they carried. And slowly

rage had taken possession of him, a wild, burning Irish rage which seemed like a fire inside him. And then at the very end the effigy of W. M. Dougherty dragged in the dust behind the old cattlemen to the accompaniment of wild “Yahoos” had been too much to bear. Suddenly for him the whole world turned red and he was filled with a passionate desire to kill Richardson, who had caused all the trouble and taken his girl away from him.

Now as he ran across the Square he was recognized here and there by individuals in the excited crowd, but before there was time to address a word to him, he was gone. Pushing his way through the cheering crowd beneath the windows of the *Daily Shield and Banner*, he ran up the stairs to the editorial room.

There, at the window, with their backs to him, stood the people who had made all the revolution in Plattsville, the people who were responsible for the insults to the old man ... all of them but Jane. He saw in a flash that she wasn't there. All the others were standing looking down at the cheering marchers in the Torchlight Procession.

Crossing the room he went directly to Richardson and taking him by the shoulder turned him round and shouted, “Now, you son of a bitch, come out and fight fair!”

For a moment, a little dazed, Mr. Richardson looked at him. Then the odd, hard look came into his eyes. Quietly, he took off his coat and said, “Sure, come on outside,” and led the way toward the door.

By this time Mrs. McLeod had become aware of what was happening and began to cry out, “Mr. Richardson, don't go! Don't go! Oh, what are we going to do?”

Willie Ferguson looked bewildered but Gashouse Mary said, “Don’t you worry! I’ll go with ’em to see there’s fair play! I’ll look after him! Don’t you worry!”

Then Jane dashed out of her corner calling, “Jimmy! Jimmy! Tom! Tom!” and followed them down the stairs.

Aida, who had been in Mrs. McLeod’s cubbyhole watching the parade with her cousin Athena’s boy, came out and cried, “Where are they all goin’? What’s all the rumpus?”

But Jimmy and Mr. Richardson had long since disappeared with Jane and Gashouse Mary following them, and Mrs. McLeod was left behind weeping and wringing her hands, to be comforted by Willie and Myrtle Ferguson and old Zimmerman.

Through the startled marchers, Mr. Richardson and Jimmy Dougherty crossed the street and ran into the Square. There by the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument they put up their hands and the fight began.

It was a magnificent fight. Jimmy was Irish and a born fighter and the broad shoulders of Mr. Richardson had not been given him by God for nothing. They went at each other like a couple of young rams, and in a second there was a circle round them made up of the tougher element of the town, men and women from the river front and girls from Franklin Street who had been given the evening out to watch the procession because everybody in Plattesville was watching the procession anyway and Franklin Street was certain to be empty.

In the crowd which filled the street Jane and Gashouse Mary lost sight of the two fighters, and for a good five minutes wandered about searching until the encouraging shouts of the little circle watching the combat guided them

toward the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Fountain. There in the dim light they caught sight of the two figures, hammering each other doggedly. The advantage was on neither side. Both faces were equally bloody, the shirts of both fighters half-torn from their backs. Around them the crowd kept increasing while Gashouse Mary, who had arrived first, kept shouting, "Stand back! Give 'em room! Stand back!"

Then suddenly Jane was in the midst of the circle pushing between the two men and crying out, "Stop! Stop! Leave him alone! Leave him alone!"

For a moment it was impossible to know which fighter she was addressing and which fighter she wished to be left in peace. And then suddenly it was apparent, for she was beating Mr. Richardson on his bare chest with both her fists, still crying, "Stop! Stop! Leave him alone!" and the fight was suddenly stopped, and in the sudden silence the crowd heard her shouting at Mr. Richardson, "It's all your fault! It wouldn't have happened ... any of it ... if you hadn't come here!"

Then with her handkerchief she began to wipe the blood from the face of Jimmy Dougherty. Until now some of the crowd had been taking sides, jeering Jimmy, but the spectacle of Mrs. McLeod's niece coming to his aid silenced them and there was no sound save a dull murmuring that increased as others joined the circle. Then Gashouse Mary, with something of the old strength she had known when she was her own chucker-out, shoved people out of the way, and in her red velvet suit and plumed hat, went to the aid of Mr. Richardson.



At the same time without any warning three policemen came through the crowd, surrounded Mr. Richardson and said, “You’re under arrest!”

This was too much for Gashouse Mary and she turned on them with a fine flow of barroom language. But Mr. Richardson stopped her and wiping the blood out of his eyes, said, “Listen to me! Let them go ahead and arrest me.”

“Are you crazy?” asked Gashouse Mary.

“I haven’t been yet, have I?” asked Mr. Richardson, his swollen lips showing a painful grin. To the policemen he said, “I’ll come along with you. What’s the charge?”

“Disturbin’ the peace and loiterin’,” said one of the policemen.

“And what about *him*?” shouted Gashouse Mary, pointing to Jimmy Dougherty, who was attempting in embarrassment to escape the ministrations of Jane. “It was *him* that started it.”

“Shut up,” said Mr. Richardson. And turning to the policemen, he said with the air of a Christian martyr, “Come on. Take me away,” and himself led the way in the direction of the county jail.

But restraint was now beyond Gashouse Mary. In her red velvet suit she climbed across the recumbent allegorical figure of War that ornamented the base of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial. When she reached the figures of Peace and Abundance, she clung to them and began to make a speech.

“Citizens of Plattesville,” she said. “Are we gonna stand for this racket any longer? Are we gonna go on witnessin’

this tyranny and corruption? Are we gonna stand for the vicious persecution of an honest man like Mr. Richardson?"

Loud cries of "No! No!" arose from the river-front workers, the ladies from Franklin Street and a great many honest and stalwart citizens who had joined the growing crowd.

"What we need," cried Gashouse Mary, "is what Plattesville ain't seen in fifty years! What we need is a good jail delivery! Who's goin' with me to the jail to rescue Mr. Richardson?"

A wild cheer rose from the crowd.

"Come on. Let's take him away from the police. Come on! We're gonna rescue Mr. Richardson."

Gashouse Mary scrambled down from the figure of Abundance across the prostrate figure of War, and the whole crowd began to move toward the county jail, a wild mob, a mob from the Southwest, suddenly revitalized, suddenly become what a mob had once been in the half-wild cattle country. It was bent now, not upon lynching a crooked gambler, but on rescuing its hero. It swept across the Square and into the street where it was joined by members of the procession which was breaking up in front of the courthouse. By the time it reached the jail, Methodist and Baptist angels, Boy Scouts, ladies from Franklin Street, old cattlemen, club women, river workers, all led by Gashouse Mary, were moving together, shoulder to shoulder toward the jail.

## 73

Again the Dougherty gang had been wrong. This time the blunder had been that of Harvey Bingham, the chief of

police, and old Flynn, the police magistrate. They had acted on the suggestion made long ago by Mr. Hirsh, the guinea pig, that if they could get anything, even the slightest thing, on Mr. Richardson they were to lock him up at once; in jail he could be kept safe and helpless. But that suggestion had been weeks earlier, and tonight, if Mr. Hirsh hadn't been cowering in the darkened upper room of the *Daily News* office, he would have sent them word not to touch Mr. Richardson even if he committed mayhem and murder. Since the incident of the tire iron he knew that tonight was the last time in the world to arrest the public hero. But neither Mr. Hirsh nor Old Dougherty was anywhere near the scene of the fight, and the police chief, who had been watching the procession from the Square and was not very bright, saw his chance and acted upon it.

Now, inside the jail, with the windows shuttered and the doors locked, he wished he hadn't been so impetuous. He was at heart a mild, lazy man who disliked trouble and he had never been confronted before with trouble in such quantities. Outside the jail, the angels, the Boy Scouts, the cattlemen, the ladies from Franklin Street were milling about with torches, shouting for him to open up the jail and deliver to them their hero. Peeping through a crack in the steel shutters he watched the mob for a time. The dying light of the expiring torches gave it a singularly ferocious aspect.

Behind him in the jail office, his prisoner, still clad only in his trousers and the fragments of a torn shirt, grinned and wiped the blood from his face. Suddenly the police chief turned and said, "If you'll come with me, I'll let you out through the coalhole at the back."

The grin on the prisoner's face broadened. "I don't want to go," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I like it here. It's quiet."

This upset the chief of police. Now that he had his prisoner, he was afraid of him. He couldn't make out this fellow Richardson. He was smarter than Old Dougherty, smarter than Hirsh, smarter than old Flynn, smarter than anybody in the town. Now, suddenly, it occurred to Harvey Bingham that the whole thing might be a trick, that Richardson had plotted to get himself arrested simply to make fools of all of them one more time.

He peeped through the shutter once more and this time he discovered that the mob, encouraged by Gashouse Mary, had got a steel girder from somewhere and were carrying it forward to batter down the door of the jail. Cattlemen, angels, Boy Scouts, even the Reverend Burwash and the Reverend Simpson were lending hands. Mary, her hat now well back on the elaborate coiffure, was shouting, "Come on, boys! We'll have the door down in a jiffy."

The police chief began to feel a little sick, and turning, he said, "Come on, be a good guy and go out through the coalhole."

"No," said Mr. Richardson stubbornly, "I don't want to."

Before the Chief could speak again there was a resounding crash as the steel girder struck the door. Then another crash and then another and another, and Harvey Bingham, who wasn't a newcomer in the county but came of the old stock, began to remember what a Plattesville mob could be like.

Between crashes he said again, "I'll give you one more chance."

"No," said Mr. Richardson, "I'm gonna stay right here."

"Well," said the Chief, "I'm scrambling through the coalhole."

Then a final crash and the steel door of the jail gave way, but before the crowd burst in, the police chief and three policemen had disappeared into the cellar to escape through the coalhole into Market Street.

Mr. Richardson, bruised, bloody and half-naked, was waiting in the office of the police chief to receive Gashouse Mary and her cohorts.

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Meanwhile, in another part of the Square a similar escape had taken place by a similar back exit. The nervous Mr. Winterbottom, Old Dougherty and Mr. Hirsh fled down the back stairs of the *Daily News* building, across a yard filled with rubbish and ash cans, alarming on their way two courting cats. When they had climbed a fence and reached the alley Mr. Hirsh disappeared into the shadows. At the corner, Mr. Winterbottom looked at Old Dougherty, hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Well, good night!"

"Good night," growled Old Dougherty, and they went their separate ways.

Mr. Hirsh, clinging to the safety of shadows, made his way to the kitchen entrance of the Beauregard Hotel. Luckily for him the whole of Plattesville was by now in the Square by the jail and the streets were deserted. Once inside the hotel he went quickly to his room and packed a suitcase. In half an

hour he was hiding in the washroom of the depot waiting for the twelve-twenty-one to take him to St. Louis.

He remained in the washroom until he heard the distant whistle of the twelve-twenty-one. Taking up his suitcase, he opened the door and walked out straight into the arms of two hard-looking men. One of them pinioned his arms and the other said, "Good evening, Mr. Sulzberger. Sorry to spoil your getaway."

Mr. Hirsh looked suddenly like a cornered rat. The lipless mouth tightened, the eyes grew beady.

"What's the matter? Let go of me. My name isn't Sulzberger and I've got to catch a train."

"You're catching it all right," said the hard-faced man who held his arms. "Only you ain't travelin' alone. You've got company."

"What have you got on me?"

"Plenty," said the other hard-faced man.

Mr. Hirsh relaxed suddenly and said, "Let go of me. I'll go along with you."

As they climbed on the train, he said mildly, "How did you know where I was?"

"A little bird told us."

Mr. Richardson had taken a gamble with his telegram. Gashouse Mary had said, "Hirsh smells bad," and she had been right.

At the moment the police appeared the crowd forgot at once the extraordinary spectacle of Mrs. McLeod's niece

administering first aid to the son of Old Dougherty. It was Gashouse Mary, clinging to the bronze figure of Abundance, who took the center of the stage, and Jimmy Dougherty, his Irish rage abated a little now, felt a sudden desire to slip away and disappear. Quietly, with Jane following him, he made his way from the monument toward the bandstand. There in the shadow they were entirely alone, for the crowd, led by Mary, was already on its way to the jail.

In silence the two of them stood there, Jane still working to staunch the flow of blood from his cut lip with a piece of his torn shirt. Up to now, because of the excitement, the whole incident had struck neither of them as extraordinary, but suddenly, with the Square grown empty and silent, they were left alone and the sense of aloneness made them both feel awkward and shy.

Jimmy said, "I'm all right."

"Sure?"

Then there was a long silence.

They were friends again and yet not friends. The old sense of intimacy had raised its head once more only to find itself confronted by pride. By instinct they were, all at once, nearer to each other than they had ever been, with that intimacy which belongs to couples long married who have been through much together. But, outwardly, they were no closer to each other than before the fight. Nothing had been solved. Indeed the situation was, if possible, worse than before, what with Mr. Richardson carted off to jail and the crusade more bitter than ever.

Jimmy looked at her and said coldly, "Well, I guess you'd better go back to the office now."

“Yes, I suppose so.” Her voice too sounded detached and indifferent.

“I’ll be going back to the *News*.”

“Good night,” said Jane.

“Good night.”

Then because she could think of nothing to say which would not sound silly, she turned and walked back once more across the empty Square toward the office of the *Daily Shield and Banner*. In the distance she could hear the cries of the crowd and presently the crashing sound of steel against steel as Gashouse Mary’s supporters attacked the door of the jail. The sounds were terrifying like the sounds she remembered vaguely out of her childhood when there was a lynching at Millersville and she was wakened in the middle of the night and, terrified, lay listening in her crib until daylight.

She thought, “I ought to go back and tell him to clear out ... to go off somewhere out of the way until the row is over. The old man ought to clear out too. A mob like that might do anything.”

And, turning back, she ran, unashamed now because the Square was quite empty and there was no one to witness her folly, but by the time she had reached the grandstand, Jimmy had already disappeared. She went as far as the office of the *Daily News* only to find the building in darkness. Frightened, she pounded on the door and called out, making wild hysterical sounds that echoed in the doorways of the empty silent Square, but to her cries there was no answer.



From the window of the *Daily Shield and Banner* office Mrs. McLeod and Aida witnessed the procession returning from the jail. They were alone because everyone else in the building had followed the mob. Mrs. McLeod would have gone too but Aida became suddenly powerful and blocked her way, saying, “You all ain’t goin’ a step out in that street, Mis’ McLeod. You’re too old to get yourself mixed up with a lot of white trash.”

So they had waited, alarmed and puzzled for a time by the distant sounds of the great jail delivery. And then presently the wave of sound began to draw nearer and up the street they saw the mob returning toward the *Daily Shield and Banner* office. The angels and doxies and cattlemen still carried dying, smoky torches and in the middle of them, borne on the shoulders of three or four old cattlemen, appeared the figure of Mr. Richardson clad now only in trousers.

Full of excitement, Aida leaned out of the window and shouted, “Come on, you all! Come on!” And aside to Mrs. McLeod she said, “What’d I tell you, Mis’ McLeod, about that boy when he first come to the house? Nobody can lick him. He’s too smart.”

In front of the *Daily Shield and Banner* office the mob halted, cheering and singing, and Mr. Richardson slipped down from the shoulders of the cattlemen and made his way to the stairway. Then Gashouse Mary climbed a hydrant and propped up by three or four of her own river-side delegation, she shouted, “Three cheers for Vinnie McLeod!” And the mob roared its admiration. Once more the tears came into the eyes of Mrs. McLeod, and then the office behind her was filled by a confusion of friends and admirers ... all the committee and Mr. Richardson, who had thrown his coat over

his shirtless torso, and Gashouse Mary and Mr. Simpson and Mr. Burwash and scores of other crusaders.

Willie Ferguson got the Bourbon out of the bottom drawer and passed it around and everybody drank out of the bottle and when it gave out old Jim Newman sent Aida's cousin Athena's boy to Hennessey's place to buy more.

Raising the bottle high above his head, an excited, rejuvenated Willie cried out, "Well, I guess we showed 'em who's runnin' Plattesville. Three cheers for Mr. Richardson."

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About one o'clock the party in the office began to break up and the celebrating mob outside to disperse and go home to bed, and at last no one remained but Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson sitting in chairs on opposite sides of the office. Mrs. McLeod said, "We'd better go home so I can put a piece of raw steak on that eye. It's going to be awful in the morning."

"I'm not worrying about that. I'd like to know what's become of Jane."

"I guess maybe she's gone home to bed. In the excitement I must have forgotten all about her."

He didn't tell her about the scene by the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Fountain, when Jane had attacked him, beating his chest with her bare fists.

"It was a little hard on her ... the whole thing," said Mr. Richardson.

Then suddenly, almost with a jerk, Mrs. McLeod got up out of her chair and said, "I forgot ... there was a telegram for you!" And she went into the office and returned with a

telegram. Mr. Richardson tore it open and read it and then with a grin handed it to her.

She read: "Publishers offer five thousand advance. Shall I go ahead with sale of picture rights?"

Mrs. McLeod sank into a chair.

"What did I tell you?" asked Mr. Richardson.

In a weak voice she said, "I don't know. I feel kind of dizzy. I don't know whether I'm coming or going."

"Better have some of this," said Mr. Richardson, and poured her a drink of Bourbon in a paper cup.

Then in the doorway appeared the figure of Jane. It was a slightly bedraggled, completely shamefaced figure, which seemed somehow to have shrunk during the excitement of the evening. For a moment she stood in the doorway very pale, hesitating, as if uncertain whether she should come into the room or turn and flee. Mrs. McLeod and Mr. Richardson looked toward her expectantly and for a moment there was a strained silence.

Then Jane in a funny, humbled voice said, "I'm sorry. I apologize. I guess I must have lost my head. I'm awfully ashamed."

"Forget it," said Mr. Richardson. "I never enjoyed a beating more."

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. McLeod. "Jimmy Dougherty didn't lick you, did he?"

"No, he didn't," said Mr. Richardson. "It was Jane who tried to beat me up."

They were tired now, all three of them, from the excitement and the primitive emotions aroused by the events of the last twenty-four hours. They were so tired that all the way home in the taxicab summoned by Mr. Richardson, they rode in silence, each one lost in his own thoughts and problems. In one corner of the taxi old Mrs. McLeod was lost in wonder over what had happened, at the strange succession of events which in so short a time had changed her whole life and precipitated her into a struggle the violence of which she had never suspected. The fear, the regrets, were almost stilled now, for she had had her moment, her big moment when Gashouse Mary had climbed on to the fire hydrant and called for three cheers for Vinnie McLeod and the whole crowd had joined in with a wild enthusiasm. In the darkness, she was smiling, without knowing it, over what had happened and over the extraordinary news about The Book. One thing would have made her happiness complete and that was the knowledge, the assurance, that J. E. knew what had happened—that she had not only saved the *Daily Shield and Banner* but had made it again the fighting newspaper it had been in the old days.

Beside her, Jane, exhausted, lay back limply, faintly aware that Mr. Richardson, whom a little while before she had attacked tooth and nail, was sitting there, very close to her, grinning to himself in the darkness. Out of the corner of her eye she saw him grinning as the light from the street lamps flashed across his face. The sight of the grin angered and humiliated her because in her heart she knew he wasn't only grinning over the success of the evening but over the spectacle of herself, of the memory of her flying at his big muscular figure like a wildcat. And he was grinning because she had given the show away, because in the excitement of

the moment she had shown all too well how she felt about Jimmy Dougherty, because she, Jane Baldwin, who thought herself so sophisticated and intellectual, had behaved after all like any immigrant factory girl. And she was angry too because she knew that sooner or later she would have to explain to him about the attack, and why she had lost her head, if for no other reason than simply to stifle that horrid grin.

In his corner, Mr. Richardson simply went on grinning.

At last when they reached McLeod's Folly, and Mrs. McLeod had left them standing alone in the big hall while she went to speak to Aida, Jane pulled herself together and with a great effort said, "I'm sorry for being such a silly fool."

Spitefully he grinned again and said, "Don't even think about it."

"Anyway," she said, "thanks for fighting over me. I appreciate it."

At this Mr. Richardson's maddening grin only broadened. One eye was by now almost swollen shut and there were three long scratches on the side of his face which she hadn't noticed before. His appearance with nothing but his coat over his naked torso was so tough and battered that but for her anger at the grin she would have laughed.

"I wasn't fighting over you," he said. "What made you think I was?"

Then the sagging bedraggled figure of Jane straightened a little and a light came into the eye, a light which made her seem a little more like the normal Jane and she said, "Then what were you fighting for?"

“Well, because Jimmy Dougherty seemed to want to fight and he was so earnest about it I didn’t want to disappoint him. And then, secondly,” he continued, in a voice mild but ironic, a little as if he were addressing one of the Thursday conferences, “I was fighting over a principle.” He must have caught the look of surprise in her face for he pushed his point further home, “No, I’m afraid you didn’t have much to do with it. I know that women always like everything to be personal but I’m afraid this was a very abstract fight on a lofty idealistic plane.”

Jane sat down suddenly, all the coyness gone out of her. “I think you’re horrible,” she said. “A horrible, nasty cold-blooded Yankee.”

Mr. Richardson went on, “I don’t say that I mightn’t have gone for you at one time in a big way, except for two things ... one, we couldn’t make a worse combination, and two, I’ve got a girl already. She’s the one who writes me a letter every day.”

“Oh!” said Jane.

Weariness was beginning to overcome them both. To show that she was utterly indifferent to him Jane took off her hat and turned to the mirror, pretending to be absorbed in arranging her hair. But over her shoulder in the mirror she still saw the reflection of his battered, mocking face. With a half-hearted burst of indignation she asked, “Then why did you make me believe you were interested in me?”

“I didn’t,” said Mr. Richardson.

“You tried to hold my hand in the movies.”

“I told you it didn’t mean anything. I was just kind of lonely.”

“Well, anyway, I think it’s all disgusting.”

“And I’ll tell you something else,” said Mr. Richardson. “You’d better come to your senses or you’re going to lose Jimmy Dougherty. Any man gets tired of tantrums after a while.”

“I’ve never been out of my senses and I don’t give a damn if I never see Jimmy Dougherty again.”

Once again the wicked glint came into Mr. Richardson’s eyes. “No,” he said. “You can’t get away with that now. You tried to before and didn’t get away with it and now you can’t, not after you beat me up.” He turned the collar of his coat over his bare chest with sudden exaggerated modesty and said, “I’ll be black and blue for a week.”

Jane only said again, “I think you’re horrible,” and began to cry.

“You mustn’t do that,” said Mr. Richardson and put one hand on her shoulder. Savagely she shook it off, “I’m only crying,” she said, “because I’m so tired.”

“I didn’t think it was for any other reason,” said Mr. Richardson. Then unexpectedly, she turned and asked, “What’s she like—that girl, I mean. Is she like me?”

Mr. Richardson laughed. “No,” he said. “She couldn’t be more different.” A twinkle came into his eye. “She’s a reformer like me. She’s got a lot of common sense.”

“No reformer,” said Jane, “has got any common sense.”

Again Mr. Richardson laughed. “Maybe you’re right,” he said. “Maybe that’s why reformers are reformers.”

And then from the kitchen door across the darkened dining room came the booming voice of Aida, “If you all doan come along, your cocoa’s gonna be all scummy.”

In the morning they all slept late since there would only be a hand-press edition entirely written by Mr. Richardson and that could be got out after lunch. At eleven o'clock Mrs. McLeod answered the telephone and heard a voice which sounded vaguely familiar. It said, "Good morning."

"Good morning."

"This is W. M. Dougherty speaking."

"Oh!" said Mrs. McLeod, and for a second she was assailed again by a cloud of nameless terrors ... that he meant to have her arrested for the jail delivery, that he meant to tell her she was bankrupt, that he meant to sue her for libel, or that he was merely calling to say that he was having her murdered. Collecting herself, she said in a shaking voice, "Yes ... what is it? What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to have a talk with you. When can I see you?"

She heard herself saying, "Oh, any time ... any time."

"Right away?"

"That'll be all right."

"I'd like to see you alone."

"I guess that would be all right."

"I don't want to come to your office and I guess you don't want to come to mine."

"Why don't you come here ... to McLeod's Folly? Then nobody would see us."

"Okay," said the voice of W. M. Dougherty. "I'll come right over."

No sooner had she replaced the receiver than she was assailed by fresh doubts and terrors. She shouldn't have told



him that she would see him alone. He might only be going to terrorize her or make a fool of her once more. She had a wild feeling that once they were alone in a room together, he could force her to do as he pleased, to call off the crusade, to leave town, even to sell the *Daily Shield and Banner* to him.

Quickly she washed her face and did her hair and went to knock on Mr. Richardson's door. She knocked again and again but no one answered and when she pushed open the door she found the room empty.

Then all at once the need to find him became hysterical and imperative and she hurried down the stairs to the kitchen. But Aida didn't know anything about him except that he had eaten a hearty breakfast and gone out an hour earlier.

"He must be at the office," said Mrs. McLeod, but when she telephoned Myrtle Ferguson, Myrtle said he hadn't come in at all. In a panic she thought, "Maybe he's gone for a walk and will come back. Anyway I've got to get dressed. I can't see W. M. Dougherty like this." And while she dressed she kept saying to herself, "I mustn't lose my head. I mustn't lose my head." And all the time she kept repeating the formula she kept saying to herself, "Oh, why should Mr. Richardson be away when I need him most?"

And then the door bell rang, fiercely, aggressively, and for a second she thought she was going to faint.

It was Aida who opened the door, and at sight of Mr. Dougherty her chocolate face turned yellow and she thought, "He's found out about those men in the cellar and he's comin' arrest us all."

But he didn't seem very fierce. He said, "I've got an appointment to see Mrs. McLeod."

“Come right in ... come right in,” said Aida. “Come right on into the liberry.” And she took him into J. E. McLeod’s library, crowded and crammed with old leather-bound books, so unlike the library in the huge Tudor house in Fleming Avenue. The sight of so many books frightened him a little. Books were one of the few things in the world that filled him with awe.

With her heart in her throat Mrs. McLeod descended the stairs and pushed open the library door. There he was, sitting in one of the worn old leather chairs, huge and formidable. (What was she going to say? What was she going to do?) But for the first time in her experience he rose when she came into the room, and as he came toward her, she saw that he didn’t seem as red-faced and bullying as the monster which had been haunting her consciousness ever since the telephone call. He looked tired and worn and he was embarrassed.

He said, “I guess you were kind of surprised when I called you up this morning?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. McLeod, as coldly as possible. “What is it I can do for you? Won’t you sit down?”

“Many thanks,” said Mr. Dougherty and seated himself again. “I just wanted to have a talk with you ... to see if we couldn’t patch things up.”

And suddenly, miraculously, she wasn’t afraid any more, and she knew that she wasn’t going to be fooled. Perhaps it was the memory of the cheer beneath the window on the night before, or the five thousand dollar advance from the publishers, or the feeling that after all, whatever happened, Mr. Richardson was there behind her, to fight and set things straight and look after her. So with a new dignity she said, “What exactly do you mean by patching things up?”

He lighted a cigar before he answered her. Then he said, “Well, you see, it’s like this. I kind of thought we might come to some sort of compromise about the whole thing.”

It was clear that every word he spoke brought him a kind of suffering. It wasn’t that he had never before made a political bargain, for he had made plenty of them, but they had always been made on his own terms, and now he—the invincible W. M. Dougherty—was proposing the bargain, not to someone or some group stronger than himself but to a woman, and an elderly, muddle-headed woman, into the bargain.

Opposite him, Mrs. McLeod sat on the edge of her chair, suddenly filled with fresh alarms because she really didn’t know anything about politics or how you made bargains. She was afraid that she’d accept anything he offered. She thought, “I mustn’t say yes or no. I must remember to say I’ll think it over.” So aloud she said, “Perhaps you’d better explain exactly what you propose.”

It was a wonderful feeling to be talking down to W. M. Dougherty. She remembered all those occasions when she had called at his office seeking news and been patronized and sent away feeling that she had been laughed at as an eccentric old fool. It was all changed now on account of Mr. Richardson. He was there behind her whenever she needed to call on him, supporting her all the time as if he had been her own son, the kind of son she had always dreamed of.

W. M. puffed for a moment on his cigar, then swung one heavy leg over the other and said in confidential tones, “I’ll tell you something, Mrs. McLeod, I’ve always liked and admired you. I don’t think you’re a very smart woman but I think you’re an understanding one, so I’m gonna tell you

something.” Again for a moment he paused reflectively and at last he said, “It all goes back a long way to when I was a kid six years old and first landed in this country. Until I was six years old I had never had enough to eat and the year I was six my old man picked up and came to America because there weren’t even any potatoes in the garden patch in County Galway. In America I had enough to eat for the first time. The old man and the old woman and us seven kids all lived in two rooms in a tenement in South Boston.” His face brightened a little and he said, “That’s where I learned politics ... in South Boston. You can learn everything there is to learn about ’em right there. I ain’t learned a damned thing since then.” He took the cigar out of his mouth and said, “Have you got a lot of time, because I want to tell you quite a long story?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. McLeod, “I’ve got plenty of time. We can’t get out the paper because the press is smashed.”

At this he scowled and said, “Well, I’ll tell you something. I didn’t know anything about that but I have a good guess who done it and he’s lost his job. But that wasn’t what I wanted to tell you.” He coughed and became embarrassed. “I don’t know why I’m tellin’ you all this. I never told it to anybody but Jimmy.”

“Go on,” said Mrs. McLeod, beginning to feel a little embarrassed. In J. E.’s big worn leather chair, Old Dougherty was squirming and writhing as if the effort of confiding in her brought him actual physical pain.

“Do go on,” she repeated helpfully.

He went on. He told her all the story he had told Jimmy on the night Jimmy got drunk and brought Fern Hedges home with him. He told her about his marriage, and his wife’s death

and his ambitions for Jimmy to be an “honest-to-God gentleman,” about how he had neglected Jimmy to make more money so Jimmy could live like a gentleman.

“I guess I’ve done some pretty dirty things now and again,” he said, “but I’ve tried to keep Jimmy out of ’em. Most of it he never knew anything about till the *Daily Shield and Banner* put it all in print. It was kind of a shock to him. I guess it upset him quite a lot. He wasn’t himself for a long time ... but he wouldn’t go back on the old man. That was pretty good of him. I guess if he’d been a good politician he would have gone back on me, but he hasn’t got any talent for politics. He’s too hot-headed and full of high falutin’ ideas. He’s like his mother that way. I guess Jimmy has had a pretty tough time these last coupla months ... what with the *Daily Shield and Banner* campaign and eatin’ his heart out about that pert niece of yours.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. McLeod with a new interest, “has he been eatin’ his heart out.... I mean ... really?”

“You ought to know that boy as well as I do. He’s been made sick by the whole thing. He musta lost twenty pounds.”

The tears came suddenly into Mrs. McLeod’s eyes. For a long time, while she listened to the crude story of his rise in the world, they had been waiting just beneath the tired old eyelids, and now at the spectacle of Jimmy’s suffering they overflowed. But at the same time she kept thinking, “I mustn’t make a fool of myself again. He’s talking like this to get something out of me and in spite of everything I’m going to get all worked up and say ‘Yes.’ ” But even saying that to herself didn’t succeed in stopping the tears.

“You see,” W. M. went on, “I’ve decided I haven’t got any right to go on making the boy miserable. I’m sixty-five years

old and I've had my fun—plenty of it. I've got to give him a chance. It ain't because I'm tired or licked and haven't got any more fight left in me. Don't you think that for a minute, even. I guess I'll have fight left when I'm ninety. It's on account of him. If it wasn't for him, I'd fight till I ran your paper out of business. You see, if I clear out now and call it a day, then he's free. Now I'll tell you what I propose to do. I've had a hankering for a long time for some fishin' and horseshoe throwin'. I'm going away tomorrow down to Daytona and I'm gonna stay there for some time ... maybe for always. The Democratic machine can go to hell so far as I'm concerned. And that'll leave the town open to you and your Reverend Mr. Burwash and Mr. Richardson and Gashouse Mary."

Opposite him Mrs. McLeod sat farther forward on the edge of her chair feeling that her heart was going to burst. Victory! Victory! What she'd been dreaming about for years had come true!

"It's mostly on account of Jimmy," he was saying. "If I clear out, then he and your niece Jane could get together. And if I go to Daytona he won't have to go on being ashamed of me."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. McLeod. "I'm sure he isn't ashamed of you."

"Oh, yes he is. And it's natural too. If I was in his place I'd be ashamed of me too. He can't help it. Anyway he can come now and then to Daytona to see me and maybe she'll come with him. She's a nice little thing ... kind of sweet in spite of bein' so uppity." He crushed out the end of his cigar against the brass of the jardiniere beside him and said, "No, all I want is a promise from you people that if I clear out and keep out

of Plattsville politics, you'll lay off the whole thing. Stop the charges, indictments, everything."

For a moment Mrs. McLeod was silent. He was putting it up to her now and she had to answer. She wanted to say, "Sure, we'll call everything off." Then there would be peace and quiet again and an end to all this hating, and Jimmy and Jane could see each other again and Jane could be happy. It was fear of Mr. Richardson which stopped her, fear of what he would say, fear of making a fool of herself again in his eyes. So she said, "I think it'll be all right, only I'll have to talk to Mr. Richardson first." She tried her best to look shrewd but the effort only resulted in her looking as if she were making faces.

"That fellow Richardson," said Old Dougherty, "ought to go into politics. He oughta run for something."

"Yes," said Mrs. McLeod, a little smugly as if she had invented Mr. Richardson. "He's pretty smart."

"There's one thing I'd like to know," said Old Dougherty.

"What?" asked Mrs. McLeod.

"Who is he and where did he come from?"

"He's a newspaperman. He comes from New York."

"What was he doin' here out of a job, getting picked up for vagrancy?"

"He wasn't out of a job. He was working," said Mrs. McLeod.

W. M. Dougherty looked astonished. "Working? At what?"

"At a book. He was writing a book about how badly men out of work were treated."

Old Dougherty pondered this remarkable statement for a moment. Then his shrewd eyes narrowed and his lips curled

in an expression of scorn. "I see," he said, "one of them radicals."

"I guess so," said Mrs. McLeod.

"He's crazy all right—crazy as a bedbug, but he's a damned good newspaperman."

W. M. rose and took up his hat. "I won't keep you any longer," he said, "only I want you to understand one thing. I'm goin' away on account of Jimmy. Nobody's got anything on me. If it wasn't for Jimmy I'd stay and lick you yet."

"I understand."

He started toward the door and then stopped. "The only thing I'm afraid of is that it's too late to patch things up between the boy and that niece of yours. He's got a hell of a lot of pride and I guess she has too."

"She has," said Mrs. McLeod.

He looked at her doubtfully, almost humbly. "You wouldn't object to 'em marryin', would you?" he asked.

"No," said Mrs. McLeod, "I wouldn't object." At the moment it was what she wanted most. She wanted to see that resigned "old maid look" leave Jane's pretty face, and she knew there was only one way of accomplishing the change.

He even grew a little more humble. "You mean you'd be willing to work for it?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know," he said. "Things being the way they are." For a moment he turned his hat round and round in his big thick hands. "It's kind of like my own story ... I mean the story of me and Jimmy's mother. Her family thought I wasn't good enough for her. They was lace-curtain Irish and I was only shanty Irish."



“I see,” said Mrs. McLeod. A McLeod marrying a Dougherty was something she had never dreamed of a few months ago, but a good deal had happened since then. Plattesville and the county weren’t what they used to be. Times had changed. And somehow, she didn’t quite know how, Mr. Richardson had taught her a lot.

Awkwardly W. M. Dougherty held out his hand. “Well, good-bye, Mrs. McLeod,” he said. “I’ve enjoyed talkin’ with you. As I said, you always seemed to me an understandin’ kind of woman.”

Once again the tears welled up, this time only because she was so happy that everything was turning out so well. She always wanted everybody to be happy and to love everybody else. And now everybody was going to be happy and even Old Dougherty was going to be happy, fishing and throwing horseshoes. She even felt herself liking him, and thought, “I suppose you like anybody, even the devil, if you get to know him well enough.” And never again would she have to enter W. M. Dougherty’s office and sit there and be patronized as if she were an old fool.

At the front door he shook hands again and said, “Well, I’ll be saying good-bye.”

“Come in again some time,” said Mrs. McLeod.

“Thanks. I guess I won’t be around for a long time.”

At the foot of the steps of McLeod’s Folly he turned and said, “I just wanted to tell you that shindig last night was the best show Plattesville’s seen since I laid eyes on the town.”

When he had gone, she turned back into the house to find Aida waiting for her in the hallway.

“What dat old devil want?” asked Aida.

“He’s going away. He’s through,” said Mrs. McLeod. “Don’t ask me any more now. I’ve got to go and tell Jane.”

But Jane didn’t receive the news with joy as she had expected. She was in her own room sitting by the window, listlessly, with that resigned “old maid look” in her eyes. When she had been told, all she said was, “It’s nothing but a trick. Anyway it’s too late now.”

## 80

But it wasn’t a trick. W. M. Dougherty was licked and nobody knew it better than W. M. Dougherty himself. In the pocket of his trousers there was a rumpled special delivery letter which read simply and briefly: “Better scram while the scrambling is good.” It was signed “Bill Swain.” But you couldn’t let the enemy know about things like that. You had to make ’em believe you’d quit because you wanted to.

As he passed out of the rickety front gate of McLeod’s Folly, he shook his head in a puzzled way like an old tired lion. He couldn’t see how it had happened. He couldn’t see how he had been licked so quickly. Even his organization, that machine he had built up so carefully on the model he had studied for so long in South Boston, had collapsed into pieces.

“Mebbe,” he thought, “this is a different country from Boston. Mebbe there ain’t enough Irish here. Mebbe there’s some kind of spirit I never got the right line on.” But in the end, it was that smart guy, Richardson, who had licked him. He was a hell of a smart guy, even if he was one of those dumb radicals.

He walked to his office by a roundabout way through alleys and backstreets, because he wasn't very eager to meet people in the street. Nowadays, when he met people they either pretended not to see him or they just nodded to him without saying anything. He knew what that meant. Nobody had to tell him. He'd been in politics long enough to know.

As he walked he forgot presently the sting of defeat, and after a time he didn't even see the citizens he passed, but only the golden sands of Daytona and a bar with plenty of Bourbon, and he heard the clank of horseshoes striking each other as they fell in the yellow Florida dust.

## 81

At the very moment W. M. Dougherty and Mrs. McLeod had their interview Jimmy and Mr. Richardson sat at each end of the long table in the office of W. M. Dougherty and Son, Contractors. They were fully dressed now but clothes could not conceal altogether the ravages of the heroic battle of the night before. Jimmy's left eye was swollen shut and his lip cut and patched with adhesive tape and Mr. Richardson's right eye was thoroughly blackened and his jaw swollen as if he were suffering from a toothache. Before them on the table stood a bottle of Bourbon and two glasses.

Mr. Richardson raised his glass. "Well," he said, "anyway, let's drink to it."

When he had come in twenty minutes earlier Jimmy Dougherty had opened the door himself and with his one good eye, glared at him, a little in resentment and a great deal in suspicion and astonishment.

He said coldly, “Good morning,” and Mr. Richardson answered, “Good morning,” and asked, “Could I speak to you for a moment about something important?”

“Yes,” said Jimmy, “if it’s important enough.”

He remained standing and didn’t ask Mr. Richardson to sit down, but Mr. Richardson took the matter into his own hands, sat down and said, “I think we can talk better sitting.” So there wasn’t anything left for Jimmy to do but sit down.

Then Mr. Richardson said, “Now let’s get two or three things straight. First, I haven’t got anything against you ... in a personal way, I mean. From what I hear of you I think you must be a pretty good sort.”

“Thanks,” said Jimmy.

“And in the second place Jane never had anything to do with the crusade. She never played any part in it and she didn’t double-cross you.”

“I knew that.”

“How?”

“She’s not that kind of a girl.”

“And in the third place, I was never on the make for Jane. I almost was—once or twice—but nothing came of it. Anyway, I don’t think she’d have any of that.”

Jimmy looked at him without saying anything, but in the one open blue eye there was an expression of bewilderment. After a moment, he said, “Did she send you here?”

“No, she doesn’t know anything about it. She’d raise hell if she knew.”

“Why?”

“Because she’d say it wasn’t any of my business and it isn’t. I only came to get things straightened out. I felt sort of

responsible for a lot of misunderstanding. Jane couldn't say it herself ... she's got too much pride."

"Yes, I guess she has. I guess that's the whole trouble between us."

"When the truce is over the fight can begin again, only don't think that Jane is mixed up in it or double-crossing you or anything."

"I did think that—sometimes—until last night."

Mr. Richardson grinned. "Yes, she made everything pretty clear last night. She's got an awful punch for a little thing her size." He puffed for a moment at his cigarette and then said, "Of course I hope I'm acting on the right supposition. You do want to marry Jane, don't you? I'm not making a damned fool of myself for nothing?"

"What did you think I wanted to do? What did you think the fight was about?"

A little taken aback, Mr. Richardson said, "Well, I was never quite sure."

"I don't see why you're so damned interested. You've done everything you could to break it up."

"I didn't know anything about it. And when I found out, it was too late to stop things even if I wanted to. But that doesn't matter now. The point is to fix things up."

"I guess I can take care of that for myself."

A grin appeared on Mr. Richardson's battered face, a grin of irresistible friendliness and warmth, a grin which had a heightened effect and value because it appeared on the face of one who was not, like Jimmy, prodigal with his grins.

"Listen," he said, "I'm not trying to interfere or be superior or any other damned thing. I like you and Jane and I want

you to get together. I'm doing this for my own sake because it'll make me feel good inside ... that's the only reason people ever do things like this. Jane's been off her feed for weeks." He lighted a cigarette and said, "If I were you I'd go and see Jane right away, this morning, and I'd get into that shiny new roadster of yours and take her right off and marry her before sundown. A couple like you has got a sociological value to the nation. You're good stock. You ought to have twenty children for the good of the State. That's what we need ... more and more children from the sturdy, respectable middle classes."

"Why don't you start a campaign in the *Daily Shield and Banner*?" asked Jimmy.

"That's a good idea ... when we get the press repaired." He stood up. "I've got to get back to the office now."

Jimmy got to his feet, slowly, still filled with suspicion.

"Have a drink?" he suggested.

"I can't think of anything I'd like better."

He fetched a bottle of Bourbon, a little resentful that Richardson seemed to consider the crusade finished and the battle won. He poured out two drinks and Richardson said, "Well, anyway, let's drink to it and to a large family."

"Leave that out of it," said Jimmy. They raised their glasses and Richardson said, "Jane has a lot of high falutin' ideas. If I were you I wouldn't take any notice of 'em. What she wants is to be subdued. She's longing for a good subduing."

"Do you mind not telling me about my own girl?"

And then the door opened and Old Dougherty himself came in, or at least stepped across the threshold, for so great

was his astonishment at the sight he beheld that he got no farther. There, before his unbelieving eyes, were Jimmy and Richardson himself, drinking together. The blood rushed into his head and again for a moment he feared he was about to have a stroke. His son and Richardson, both battered and bruised, drinking together, apparently in a friendly way. The sight surpassed anything he could have imagined two days ago ... it surpassed even the spectacle of his own grudging surrender to Mrs. McLeod. He heard Mr. Richardson saying, "Here's to matrimony."

Then Jimmy noticed him and said, "Come in. We were talking about fishing. Come in and have a drink."

Letting go of the door knob Old Dougherty said, "I guess I need a drink ... a good strong one."

## 82

When Old Dougherty had gone and Jane had been told of the victory, Mrs. McLeod had to tell Aida everything that had happened while the two of them had been shut in the library. She was eager to hurry to the office and tell Myrtle and Willie and old Zimmerman and all the rest, but she knew that if Aida's curiosity wasn't satisfied Aida would have a "misery" and go about complaining all day, dragging one foot after another. Hurriedly, she told the story, omitting a good deal, but it wasn't any good because Aida suspected her of hurrying and kept asking, "Why?" and "When?" and "How?" in the most tiresome manner. And then when she had at last satisfied Aida, Aida asked, "And what about Mis' Jane? Is she finished with that Jimmy?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. McLeod.

“It’s a shame, Mis’ McLeod, her carryin’ on about him.”

Then Mrs. McLeod was thoughtful for a moment. Then she said, “You’ve been in love, haven’t you, Aida?”

“Yes,” said Aida wistfully. “A powerful long time ago.”

“Why did you marry Sam?”

“Because I was in love with him. I was crazy about that man.”

“And he was nothing but a no-good river nigger?”

“That’s right, Mis’ McLeod, but he was a special river nigger.”

“Well, Jimmy Dougherty is a special Irishman. You leave Miss Jane alone.”

“All right, Mis’ McLeod, ah’ll think about it. You kinda put it in a different way.”

Then Aida left her, shaking her grizzled old head thoughtfully as she rolled back into the kitchen, and Mrs. McLeod, jamming her old hat on her head, hurried off to the office.

And there she found a fresh surprise. Myrtle Ferguson was upstairs waiting for her. She came forward with a look of wonder and astonishment in her eyes, holding stiffly in front of her, a card. She said, “There’s a gentleman to see you. This is him,” and for a moment Mrs. McLeod’s heart was stopped again by the expression of awe and mystery on Myrtle’s face. She thought wildly, “Maybe it’s a Federal officer.” Then she took the card and read:

JOHN M. BURNHAM

*The New York Register. The Chicago Journal.*



*The New York Recorder. The Detroit Gazette.*

*The Boston News. The San Francisco Review.*

*The Kansas City Globe.*

When Mrs. McLeod looked up, Myrtle said, her eyes still round with wonder, "He must be the Burnham-Leslie Chain."

"What do you suppose he wants here?"

"Maybe he's come to buy the *Daily Shield and Banner*. Maybe he's heard about all we've been doing."

"Maybe," said Mrs. McLeod. "Tell him to come right up. We can't keep a man like that waiting."

Excitement took possession of Mrs. McLeod. For a moment she felt completely dizzy and thought of asking Willie Ferguson for a taste of Bourbon. But there wasn't time for that. She had to put her desk in order. What would a man like John M. Burnham think of her as an editor if he saw her desk in such a mess? Hurriedly she opened drawers and threw papers into them willy-nilly. With her handkerchief she dusted the top of the desk, even spitting on it to remove the stain of ink where three days ago she had overturned the inkwell. Hurriedly she tried to put her unruly hair in order and set her collar and blouse right, and then the door opened and Myrtle Ferguson in a voice still strange with awe said, "This is Mrs. McLeod, Mr. Burnham."

Mrs. McLeod made a wild effort to pull herself together and gain control of her voice.

"Good morning," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you."

With her woman's eye, she considered Mr. Burnham. He was a good-looking, well set-up man about fifty-five. It was,

she decided, a nice face, a strong face with a big jaw and firm chin and clear gray-blue eyes.

There was a moment's awkward pause and then the great Mr. Burnham said, "I was in St. Louis so I thought I'd just run down and say hello to my son."

"Yes," said Mrs. McLeod, bewildered but unwilling to make a fool of herself.

"I hadn't heard from him for some time. You see, we had a difference of opinion, partly about politics and partly about how to run a newspaper. He decided to go off on his own for a while. I guess you've found out that he's pretty radical ... practically red, in fact."

For a moment Mrs. McLeod felt that she was going mad. For a moment she even suspected that she was already mad and that everything which had happened during the last few months had simply been an hallucination. She had to say something, and she couldn't go on pretending that she knew what he was talking about without getting herself into a hole and making a complete fool of herself.

So she said, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm afraid I don't know your son. I don't know anyone called Burnham."

Mr. Burnham looked at her with astonishment. Then he said, "This is the office of a newspaper called the *Plattenville Daily Shield and Banner*, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's where my son has been working."

"I'm afraid there's some mistake. There isn't anyone on our staff by that name."

Mr. Burnham didn't answer her at once. He thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out a telegram and gave it to her, saying, "That's from him; I received it day before yesterday."

She read the telegram:

"Come and see what I've done. Look me up newspaper called Shield and Banner Plattesville. Jack."

Mrs. McLeod handed it back to him.

"I can't imagine what it means. We've got a young man here who's been with us some time, but his name is Richardson."

Mr. Burnham's gray-blue eyes narrowed. "What does he look like?"

"Well," began Mrs. McLeod. "He's quite nice looking, blondish, with gray-blue eyes, a hard worker..." Then through her own words came to her a sudden flash of understanding. Mr. Richardson looked like Mr. Burnham, exactly as Mr. Burnham must have looked at his age before he had begun collecting all that big chain of newspapers. No wonder Mr. Richardson knew everything there was to know about newspapers. For a second she stared at Mr. Burnham and then she said, "I guess maybe Mr. Richardson might be your son working under another name."

Mr. Burnham grinned, "That sounds like him. He does things like that," he said. "Tell me, is he any good?"

So Mrs. McLeod told him. She had been wanting for a long time to tell someone what she thought of Mr. Richardson, but there had never been anyone to whom she might talk, and now she had her chance, a big chance, to tell everything. She told Mr. Burnham how she had found him in jail, of his unwillingness to come out, of how he first built up

the newspaper and then launched the crusade, about how he had got The Book published, about how Pugface Mahoney and Little Hermie had taken a pot shot at him, about the Torchlight Procession and the heroic fight with Jimmy Dougherty in the park beside the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, about the jail delivery, about Gashouse Mary and the influence of Bill Swain, and the final triumph which ended with the withdrawal of Old Dougherty to Daytona.

"He ought to be in politics," she said. "Even Old Dougherty says so."

Mr. Burnham, it was easy to see, was pleased. He grinned. He chuckled over the story of the fight and the jail delivery. He said, "He's a good boy. He's got plenty of energy and spirit, only he's stubborn. I guess he's just a born reformer. Maybe he'll get over it as he grows older."

"He's awful good at it," said Mrs. McLeod. "I thought he must know a lot about newspapers. He seemed to know pretty nearly everything."

"He does. He's been working around newspapers ever since he was a kid, only he isn't satisfied with being a first-rate newspaperman. He's always wanting to reform the world. He'd be a lot better off if he stuck to his job."

And then Mr. Richardson, battered, bruised and bandaged, came in.

## 83

Jane was halfway down the path bordered by the ragged syringas and lilacs, hurrying to the office when she heard the voice of Aida calling, "Mis' Jane! Mis' Jane! Telephone for you!"

The sound of Aida's voice startled her and for a moment even frightened her, not because it was the first time the voice had ever summoned her to the telephone but because there was a queer sound to it, a note that was unfamiliar. For a week or more Jane had been aware of many things, subtleties which in her happier, more bumptious days, she had never perceived. It was as if her perceptions had been sharpened mysteriously by her unhappiness: the creak of a chair, the slamming of a door, the sound of a motor horn late at night, sometimes set her nerves on edge. It all went with what Aida called "her peaked look" and what to Mrs. McLeod was the "old maid look." Now as she passed Aida she looked at her sharply and even with suspicion, but the only response was a white-toothed grin.

The telephone was an old-fashioned affair attached to the wall beneath the great stairway, and when she answered it she expected to hear either the voice of Aunt Vinnie or of Mr. Richardson, chiding her perhaps for being so late at the office. Instead she heard a voice that was unmistakable, saying, "Is that you, Jane?"

For a second she felt that she was going to faint and grasped the table beside her to keep from falling. Summoning all her strength, she managed to ask, "Yes, who is it?" as if she did not already know perfectly well.

"You know who it is," said the voice.

"Yes ... yes, I do." But suddenly her happiness made her shy so that she couldn't think of anything to say except things which her pride would not allow her to say. She wasn't even able to show him that everything was all right, that she wasn't angry or resentful or suspicious any more, that at that moment nothing in the world was of any importance save

having him back again ... neither family, nor pride, nor the crusade, nor even self-respect.

“I guess you’ve heard the news,” said the voice.

“Yes, Jimmy.”

“Will you have dinner with me tonight?”

“Yes.” She wanted to cry out. She wanted to say so much more, but all she could say was “yes” timidly like a schoolgirl.

“We’d better go to Millersville. It’s the middle of the week. There won’t be any crowd.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll pick you up at home about five o’clock.”

“All right.”

Then there was a moment’s silence and the voice—that familiar voice, so Irish, so beguiling, so dangerous—came to her again.

“What’s the matter? You aren’t still sore at me?”

“No, Jimmy.” And then she managed with a great effort to humble her pride and say, “I won’t ever be disagreeable again.”

And then the voice again, a voice which in its warmth, its urgency, was as beautiful as the plumage of a courting bird of Paradise.

“That’s a good kid. I don’t know whether I can wait.”

“Good-by, Jimmy.” She had to say good-by quickly, before she began to cry. She could feel the tears coming on. “Good-by,” she said again in a whisper.

“Good-by, sweetheart.”

And then she slipped into the chair beside the telephone and began to cry as she had never cried before in all her life. The tears were strange, voluptuous tears, tears of hysterical happiness, which seemed to refresh her and give her strength. And from behind the door where she had been listening all the time, appeared the figure of Aida saying, "What's the matter, honey? Ain't got bad news?"

"No," said Jane, hysterically. "No ... no."

Aida gave her a friendly pat on the back and said, "Ah'll go fetch you all some whisky."

When she returned the sobbing had died away a little, and while Jane drank the whisky, Aida said something very odd, "Ah guess you all ain't a little girl no more. Ah guess you all got some sense now. Ah guess you all is a grown-up woman lak Aida and you aunt, Mis' McLeod."

## 84

Well before five o'clock the olive-green roadster was at the door and Jimmy with his swollen eye and cut lip was bounding up the high steps three at a time. On the night before, in the half-light of the Square, in the confusion of the fight with his face all bloody and bruised, Jane had noticed how thin he was and how pale. Now the sight of him made her want to cry, but it made her want to laugh too because his woebegone appearance told her that he too had been suffering the way she had been.

Then for a second after he reached the top of the steps, they were both struck dumb by shyness. There had been only one way of ending that dash up the path and the high steps, and that would have been for him to take her in his arms and

kiss her; but they couldn't do that right there in broad daylight on the front porch of McLeod's Folly with people going past on the sidewalk and Aida undoubtedly concealed behind the window curtains in the parlor.

Abruptly, Jimmy broke the silence by saying, "Are you all ready?"

She gave a little nervous laugh, "Don't I look as if I was ready?"

"Well, let's go."

They drove wildly, the way only Jimmy drove, out of the town, past Doughertys' house, past the familiar pretentious houses and gardens of Fleming Avenue, through Shantytown just beyond, but to both of them the whole scene that raced past them was a new world, different, illumined by a kind of radiance it had never known before. They never spoke at all, and at last when they were a good ten miles out into the open country, Jimmy drove to the side of the road and stopped the car. There should have been a wood or a flowery bosquet, but on that huge plain there was not a tree save the scraggy cottonwoods which grew far off near the ranch houses.

There in the midst of vastness, alone save for the big soft round eyes of the short-horn cattle beyond the wire fence, he took her in his arms, kissed her and held her close for a long time. At last, with both of them a little pale and shaken, he said, "I guess maybe we'd better get along to Millersville before anything happens."

It was a different ride from the last one, months ago when they had quarreled and Jimmy had stopped the car and threatened to return to Plattesville. They talked now about the crusade, about Mr. Richardson, about The Book, about the jail delivery, even about the imminent departure of Jimmy's



father, not seriously but as if the whole thing had been a huge joke. It did not matter now, any of it. Jane was guilty of giggling, something she had never before done in her whole life. But underneath she kept thinking, "Maybe what happened was all to the good. I've got some sense now. I know what matters and what doesn't. I'll never be disagreeable again. Help me, God, never to be disagreeable again no matter what Jimmy does ... now I know what I want. It's frightening to be so happy." And now and then she would glance sidewise at Jimmy to make sure he was still there and she wasn't dreaming. And she thought, "Maybe after all it was a good thing that Mr. Richardson came along and stirred everything up."

As they climbed the ridge which led down on the other side to the little sapphire lake beside Cousin Ira's hotel, Jimmy said, "That Richardson fellow is a pretty good guy."

She laughed, "You were jealous of him, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was jealous as hell."

"You needn't have been. He's just a machine. He isn't even human. He's just a reformer."

"I'll bet you did try flirting with him."

"Yes, but only because I wanted to make you jealous."

"Well, you did."

## 85

It was "Mr. Richardson" who suggested the dinner party to celebrate the reconciliation and the engagement of Jimmy Dougherty and Jane Baldwin. He proposed giving it himself at the Beauregard Hotel, but Mrs. McLeod put up strenuous objections.

“We couldn’t do that,” she said, “on account of Aida. She’d never get over it if we didn’t let her cook the dinner. She can get in her cousin Athena to wait on table. We always used to have Athena in the days when we had people in. She worked in St. Louis once in a rich brewer’s family and she knows all about serving.”

They put their heads together and made out the list. There would be the great Mr. Burnham of the Burnham-Leslie newspapers and Willie and Myrtle Ferguson and Jim Newman and Jane’s mother and father.

“And what about W. M. Dougherty?” asked Mr. Richardson.

“But he’s already gone,” said Mrs. McLeod. “He went to Daytona the day after the Torchlight Procession.” For a moment she hesitated and then said, “But there’s somebody else I’d like to have.”

“Who?” asked Mr. Richardson.

“Gashouse Mary.”

“Of course, we’ll have her.”

For two whole days Aida, aided by Athena who shared her cousin’s bed for two nights, labored over the banquet. It was a grand affair, with cream of tomato soup, trout from Cousin Ira’s hatchery cooked in oatmeal, Maryland fried chicken, new peas, mashed potatoes which were a poem, sweet corn, salad, lemon ice cream and chocolate cake.

On the day of the feast Aida beamed and bustled. In this there was nothing unusual: the prospect of feeding large quantities of people always raised Aida’s spirits. It was something else in her manner which roused the suspicions of Mrs. McLeod. For thirty years they had been mistress and

servant: for thirty years they had been friends: for thirty years they had known each other intimately: and Mrs. McLeod knew all the signs displayed by Aida when she had a secret. They were signs almost as violent as those which indicated one of Aida's "miserics." All day she went about smiling slyly, chuckling and even talking to herself. From noon onward on the day of the banquet, Mrs. McLeod was aware that Aida had "something up her sleeve."

It was no use questioning her. When Aida had a secret or a surprise to spring, wild horses could not drag a hint of it from her. What it could be this time, Mrs. McLeod had not the faintest idea. The suspicions crystallized, however, when at seven o'clock she went in to look at the table and found that Athena had laid one place too many. When she summoned Aida and questioned her, Aida put on what Mrs. McLeod called her "canary swallowing" look and said, "Ah guess Athena's made a mistake. She's kind of dumb—Athena," and herself took off the extra cover. But when Mrs. McLeod by chance returned to the dining room a little later, the extra plate was there on the table once more, and she divined that someone was coming as a surprise. She didn't speak of the matter again, but cudgeling her brain with all her might, she could not imagine who the surprise might be.

Mrs. McLeod took an hour off during the afternoon to have her hair waved for the first time in years. She wore her best foulard, and when at last she was ready and stood before the mirror of the huge walnut bureau in her bedroom, she was herself astonished at how neat and collected she looked. She even looked young, younger than she had looked in ten years. It was as if the last two or three days had wiped out scores of tiny, weary wrinkles. As she stood there she heard Mr.

Richardson come out of his room and go down the big stairway and out of the house. From her window she saw him go down the path between the lilacs and turn toward Main Street.

“Where on earth can he be going,” she wondered, “at this hour? It’s only half an hour till dinnertime.”

She got no further with her speculation, for the car bringing Jane’s parents from the ranch drove up and she had to go downstairs to greet them.

A little while later Jim Newman arrived, and then Jane came downstairs to see about the cocktails, and then Mr. Burnham appeared, and presently Gashouse Mary arrived in a taxicab, dressed in a bright green, summer evening dress with a white fox fur about her shoulders. She wore combs studded with brilliants in her elaborate coiffure, and on her bosom and wrists and in her ears her whole parure of garnets. And then Willie Ferguson in a hired dinner coat which hung on him like a tent, and Myrtle Ferguson in a blue foulard dress came in. And after them Jimmy arrived, his face still a bit battered but with lips no longer swollen and spread now in a grin, half-sheepish, half-delighted.

Jane distributed cocktails and the party began to liven up. Mr. Burnham and Gashouse Mary took a liking to each other, and he led her on to telling stories of life in dance halls and bars along the river. Once, twice, three times, Mrs. McLeod went anxiously to the window for some sign of Mr. Richardson but there was none. The fourth time she was rewarded.

Coming up the steps was Mr. Richardson and with him was Aida’s surprise—a strange woman. Mrs. McLeod had

only a glimpse of her, but she knew at once by her dress that she didn't come from Plattsville.

A moment later Mr. Richardson was in the room, saying, "I want to introduce my fiancée—Prudence Higginson."

She was a tall girl and was dressed in a tweed suit and flat-heeled shoes. And she wore a soft, rather mannish shirt with a necktie and horn-rimmed spectacles. Her dark hair she wore long and done in a "bun" at the back of her head. You couldn't tell whether she was pretty or plain; but you could tell that she was intellectual. She wasn't shy. She shook hands with everyone and said she hoped that they weren't late, but that her train had only just come in and there wasn't time to change her clothes even if she'd brought any clothes. Jack's telegram, she said, had left her with only forty minutes to catch the train from Boston for the West.

Jane, standing next to Jimmy, so close that their fingers touched, felt a little lift in her heart. She knew she was looking pretty, prettier than she had ever looked in her life before. She thought, "If that's his type, I see why he didn't fall for me," and then again, "If that's the way common sense makes you look, I'm glad I haven't got any." But they seemed to like each other—Miss Prudence Higginson and Mr. Richardson—in their Yankee way.

Then Miss Higginson, in a very polite, well-bred way, asked Jane, "When is the wedding to be?"

For a moment Jane hesitated and Jimmy, grinning, prodded her and said, "Go on. Tell 'em."

"It's been already," said Jane. "Cousin Ira married us in Millersville the day after the Torchlight Procession."

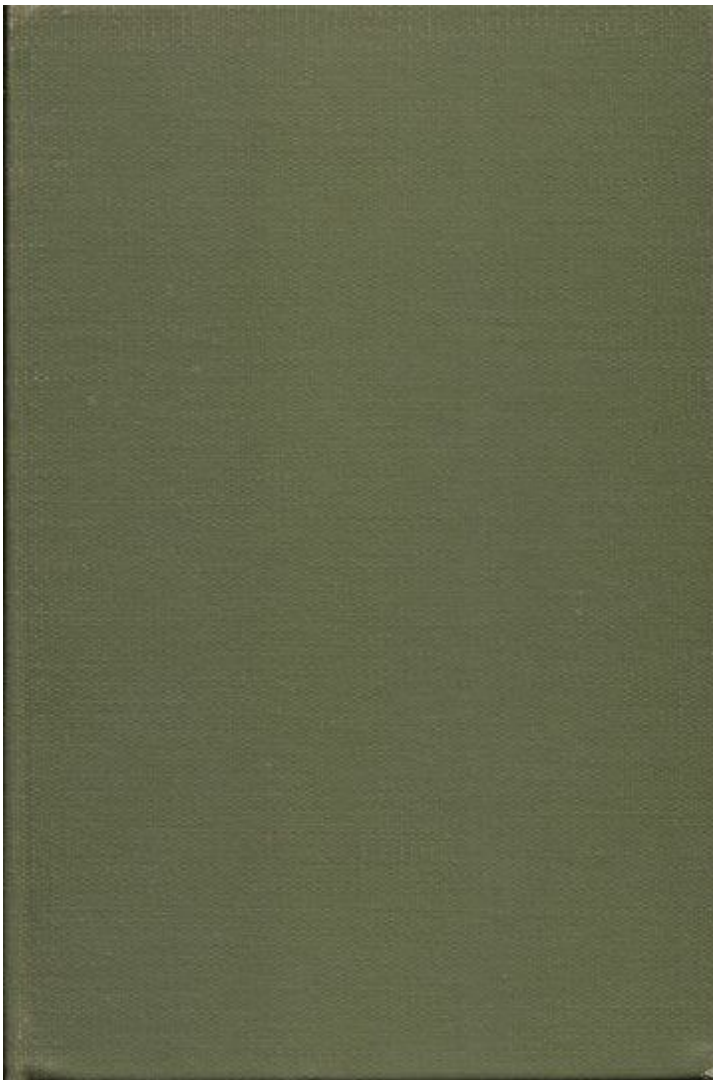
"We got married before anything else happened," said Jimmy.

When the sensation had died down, everybody kissed the bride, and Jane's mother cried a little, and then everybody drank to the newly married couple, and then Mr. Richardson raised his glass and said, "Now let's drink to Mrs. McLeod, who cleaned up Plattesville"; and while they raised their glasses and drank, she stood there confused and red and happy with tears in her eyes. With a lump in her throat she managed to say, "It wasn't me, it was Mr. Richardson."

Mr. Richardson laughed, "I couldn't have done anything if you hadn't got me out of jail." Then he drew out of his pocket a fat envelope and said, "Here's the contract for The Book," and turning to Miss Higginson he said, "Mrs. McLeod's written a book. The first publisher that read it took it. It's called *McLeod's Folly*." He looked at Mrs. McLeod and between them there passed a swift look of understanding. "I think it's an awfully good title," Mr. Richardson added.

Then the voice of Athena interrupted. "Mis' McLeod," she said. "You all is served in the dining room."

As Mrs. McLeod with the great Mr. Burnham of the Burnham-Leslie Chain led the way to dinner, she had a quick glimpse of Aida's figure as she scuttled away in the direction of the kitchen. She had been there all the time, hiding behind the plush curtains since the moment Mr. Richardson arrived bringing his surprise.



Typographical error  
corrected by the etext  
transcriber:

seen Jimmy Dougherty=>  
seen Jimmy Dougherty {pg  
81}

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[The end of *McLeod's Folly* by Louis Bromfield]