You Too

Roger Burlingame

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BY

ROGER BURLINGAME

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TO MY MOTHER

YOU TOO

I

GAIL stood on the threshold of freedom, and, in the manner of persons who have suddenly attained some much-desired thing, contemplated it dubiously. He was almost afraid of it, now it lay so directly in front of him. He felt his footing insecure as a horse who has bolted and whose rider, instead of pulling up, has unexpectedly let loose the rein.

And this was permanent freedom. Not the two-ended freedom of a week's or a month's vacation. There was nothing to bind him any more. He would live on impulse now; no one would say, Do this; time would have no meaning. There would be time for everything. Time to work, time to be idle, to lie long hours on one's back and think free thoughts.

The train puffed out behind him, and Gail half turned to run after it, away from this frightening thing. But the last rocking car was vanishing, and the few people had scattered from the station, and he was inevitably here and alone.

A lake, smiled on by a setting sun, stretched quiet before him. There seemed to Gail a suggestion of irony in that parting smile of the sun, as if the sun and the lake were winking at each other about him. A cool wind was beginning to rumple the water. Night would soon be about its business. It would go about its business indifferent to his freedom. There was no freedom in the cosmos. It had appointed tasks to do, and it did them with definite punctuality. Gail was patently out of place in the midst of this ordered succession; in the way, as it were. A voice would tell him to move on, presently, and not stand there blocking the scheme.

A star came in the green wake of the sun and laughed at him quietly. It was intolerable, this mockery of the universe. Yet he must go on with it. He had wanted it too much to relinquish it now.

Back there in the city, where he had been hand-cuffed, leg-manacled, straitjacketed to a desk, it had been the only hope of all his thought. When five o'clock came, there in the office, with the thrill of dusk and new lights pricking through it, he would get up, stiff and cramped, and look out the west window over the darkening city; out over the tangle of chimneys and

water-tanks, and dream deliciously—of this. Somewhere beyond all those roofs and walls; beyond that sign flaring in the gray announcing to the world that Golden Soap is pure; beyond the misty place where the river was; beyond all these was Freedom, a green land with late yellow sunlight on it and long, slant shadows.

Back there in the publishing house of Hartwell, Blake and Hartwell, where literature was produced somewhat in the manner of Golden Soap, Gail had struggled in his chains for two unhappy years. Before that had been the war, with none of France and little of romance, and before that had been a year of college, now but a hazy streak across a vast abyss. Emerging from these things upon the still flooding tide of youth, he had decided his ambitions were literary and, like many persons thus afflicted, had supposed a publishing house to be a proper outlet. Having little guidance in such matters from an artistic and unpractical father, he had seized the first chance that offered, in a house where literature was a broad formula, embracing bad drama, sensational juvenile fiction, and Practical Guides to Success.

So obstacled, Gail's ambitions acquired new strength; he created furiously in the evenings, and Daniel Winbourne, his father, a painter of rare gifts, abetted him, in the manner of artists, by scathing and sympathetic criticism. His life with his father, in a pleasantly disordered studio in the 'teens of New York, was one relief in this season of pain which made it nearly bearable; another was a club dedicated to the arts, where he was welcome in a little group of the younger writers then in the beginning of their ascendancy. At home and at "The Anarchs" he could pour out his discontent in the scant intervals of his liberty and be rewarded with amused sympathy.

At the office he was buffeted about among Philistines. His chief, J. Simpson Hartwell, who had risen from salesman ranks, deplored Gail's "highbrow" tastes, and rapidly removed him from the editorial department while he was in the act of declining a seller. Thence he had shunted him into the edges of the sales "end," where Gail had disgraced himself by agreeing audibly with a buyer about the inferior quality of one of the Hartwell products, and thence he would undoubtedly have been precipitated into the chill and friendless street but for an unexpected card played, as it were, from the sleeve of Destiny.

It happened on a day in early spring—one of those days on which Destiny and other wantons are said to be more than ordinarily active—and Gail had arrived early while the offices were yet empty and gloomy with the

ominousness of Monday. He had spent the week-end in the country, which was blushing just then with the first self-consciousness of spring; the day before he had walked, as it seemed, from hilltop to hilltop, hardly touching the feathering valleys between; he had watched the wind bend the poplars, and let it blow cool and strong and good-smelling in his face, and sensation had flooded him almost voluptuously.

Now, here in this hated enclosure, the windows were shut against the spring, and Saturday's staleness still hung in the air. Familiar papers leered up at him from the square piles on his desk where, in the thrill of Saturday freedom, he had piled them, as if one could acquit oneself of disorder by putting things in rectangles. They leered, too, from the silly wire baskets, labelled "Done" and "Pending"—classifications long since obsolete. They were acquiring a look of aged irony, those papers, from much putting off.

Was life to be always thus, with unfinished things leering at one; a succession of Saturday pilings and Monday unpilings with that brief flash between—gone ere it could be touched? Gail turned and opened the window. A full west wind smote him suddenly and scattered the piles on the floor. How pleasantly warm it smelled, with still, even in the city, a sort of nondescript fragrance on it!

The door banged shut in the draft, opened again slowly, and Miss Orkey, the stenographer, entered with a little scream. Gail said:

"Good morning, Miss Orkey; it's spring."

"Yes, Mr. Winbourne, but look at the floor!"

Gail laughed.

" 'Done' and 'Pending' all mixed up." Miss Orkey was carefully collecting them. "That's what spring does to you, Miss Orkey, mixes the Dones and Pendings in your soul."

Miss Orkey looked up a little shocked. It was not in her code to mention one's soul during office hours. There was a suggestion of indecency about it; a basis for incipient familiarities. She collected the papers, weighted them, looked helplessly at the window and at Gail, seated herself at her desk and began counting aloud the words in a manuscript.

"One, two, three, four, five," she droned. "One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four, five. That makes four. Four times twenty-four." Her voice travelled slowly up the scale, then coasted down, gathering momentum.

Gail, sorting his papers, came across one that had fallen from another desk, and Destiny, stepping up from nowhere, threw in her ante. The paper was an intended advertisement, a "blurb," setting forth the beauties of the

“Learn to Do Things Series.” Gail was filled with the desire to burlesque it, to produce a colossal parody of the whole art of blurbery.

Accordingly, he laid out a sheet of clean white paper, collected a handful of colored crayons, tied himself into knots, rumpled his shock of disordered hair, and plunged into the ecstasy of creation.

Meantime, unnoticed by Gail, the company’s rightful blurb writer entered and took his place. After fumbling about for several minutes and asking questions of Miss Orkey, he addressed Gail directly.

“Did you see an ad of mine, Winbourne?”

On the second repetition Gail uncoiled himself, and his eyes came slowly back to consciousness.

“What?” he said. “Oh, it’s you, Smith. How’s this for the super-blurb! I tell you it knocks those silly screams of yours higher than a kite. Get this, Smith. There’s the layout.” He tossed a paper emblazoned with colors on Smith’s desk. “Now for the blurb. Listen:

ARE YOU CUTTING COUPONS OFF YOUR DREAMS?

Or are your dreams liabilities? Are your dreams rock foundations on which to rear stately mansions for the posterity of civilization? Or are they shifting sands presaging collapse?

WHO ARE THE RULERS OF TO-MORROW?

The divine right of kings is a fetich of a forgotten past. Feudal lords and conquering generals rot in the ashes of Nineveh and Tyre. The rulers of to-day are the dreamers of yesterday. The rulers of to-morrow are the dreamers of to-day.

ARE YOU A DREAMER?

A real, practical dreamer, seeing visions in the night, visions of future civilizations? The kind of dreamer that dreamed the wireless, the aeroplane, the automobile, synthetic indigo, the telephone, the thousand and one sound, sane, practical dreams that are to-day the great fundamental realities of our quick-moving world?

SUCH MEN AS YOU

forward-thinking, red-blooded, one hundred per cent American he-dreamers; these were the men who have made possible the beautiful world of business, commerce, industry, and home-life in which we live.

YOU TOO CAN DREAM

Yet not make dreams your master. You, going about your business and your household tasks, can see the visions that these dreamers saw, can make your dreams creative, constructive, real, fundamental, dividend-producing dreams, and put yourself and your children, and your children's children on the map of to-morrow.

WE WILL MAKE YOU A SUCCESSFUL DREAMER

Send no money. Simply clip the coupon from this page and you will receive, all charges prepaid, a full set of "Practical Dreamers of To-day" in half morocco, for which, if content after ten days' inspection, you may remit as indicated on our intermittent interval schedule. Our sale is your satisfaction. Our service is your surety.

"How's that, Smith?"

"But we have no set of 'Practical Dreamers of To-day.' "

"Of course not, but what's the matter with the 'Modern Invention Series?' Change the name. 'Practical Dreamers of To-day.' What's in a name? It's a knock-out! By George, when this comes out they'll run a dreaming schedule in the office; ten dreams a day or out you go, and a bonus for extra dreams. Think of it! Dreams for salesmen! Just wait till I pull this on J. Simpson. 'Excuse me, sir, but I should like to confer with you on six entirely new, up-to-date, selling dreams.' Eh, Smith?"

"H'mm," said Smith.

"Damn it, Smith, I've worked half an hour to make you laugh."

Smith did not think it funny. Smith was not in the habit of thinking things funny. He was a solemn, hard-working, regular person, laconic, and hence reputed of great wisdom. Nothing was known of him beyond the office—not even his Christian name. When he was required to sign something, he signed it "Smith," simply, like a prime minister. He tossed the layout back to Gail and went on sorting his papers. Once or twice he looked up with a suspicious and slightly hunted look, but nothing more was said.

Gail remembered that spring morning with sharp remembrance. It had been the beginning of the end. It had been immediately after that Mr. Hartwell—J. Simpson himself—had stormed in and boomed at him as he had never boomed before, and at the end of his booming Destiny had played the card.

"All you do is talk," J. Simpson had said, while his thick neck reddened between the wings of his collar. "I hear you all day, talk, talk, talk, keeping Smith and everybody else from their work. I tell you, young man, I'm

getting sick *and* tired, that's what I am. I've just about reached the end of my rope. I've been damn patient with you. Let you stay after you'd turned down my best manuscripts and knocked my books to my own customers. I've just about reached the end of my rope, that's what I have! Understand?"

Gail expressed regret that he had arrived at that point.

"And what is more, when your month is up out you go, bag and baggage."

Gail started. Out of the corner of his eye he remarked a slight smile of incipient satisfaction on Smith's rarely smiling face.

"But, sir——"

"No buts. Bag and baggage! Understand?"

Why bag and baggage? Gail thought of himself staggering under portmanteaus. At this point, however, Mr. Hartwell observed the blurb, and, followed cat-like by Smith's eye, picked it up. He snorted once, then grew absorbed. He read the scrawled text through, consulted the "layout" and read the text again.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said when he had finished. "Make it a month's probation. End of a month I'll talk to you again. Meantime, you buckle down and let up on the talking, and see you keep busy and show me some results."

He stalked out with Gail's blurb in his pocket. Gail thought he saw him glare at Smith as he passed.

The weeks that followed were so fraught with a new and unknown pain, and culminated with a shock so utterly crushing that to Gail, contemplating them now at the entrance to his new life, they formed a gap of inarticulate nothingness. As, when one is struck by a stunning blow, losing consciousness, one loses, too, the remembrance of the interval immediately before it, so Gail now had lost the details of this desperately fraught period. In it his father had gone from vigorous life into a sudden and hopeless illness; pneumonia, quick-consuming, of the sort that strikes so definitely, so violently that it seems from the start that its victim has been pointed out by Death; ten days he had lived, kept mechanically breathing by the devices of the doctors, and then the incomprehensible Stranger had stalked, mocking, through, and Gail was left alone with memory.

Black days following; moving like slow machinery; sympathy variously articulated; eulogies in the press; picture-dealers calling on Gail; mechanical and seeming meaningless legal routine; black days, these, obscured now in the deep gulf.

It seemed now, looking back by the shore of this darkening lake where new life was to be lived, that eternity had been compassed by those few weeks; that the sum of all time lay in that profound abyss. When he had emerged from it life was definitely divided; a separate existence lay across it, infinitely removed, as we dream of earlier incarnations. On this hither side was no path—the confusion of desert.

Gail went back to the Hartwells like a stranger; faces that looked at him embarrassed and muttered sympathy seemed unfamiliar and not real. Yet on his first arrival something was brought to him that bridged the interval, flashed to him sharply and with keen, sudden sensation of real pleasure, the brighter color of the past. It was a letter from the editor of *The Hour Glass*, a friendly "Anarch," telling him he had "landed" the best of his stories; with it a copy of the magazine with his first-born in the flesh of fair print. In the instant the blackness lightened about him, and he smiled; then seeing surprise at his smile from watching faces, he concealed the thing in his pocket and feigned indifference in the manner of persons thus discovered in the presence of their creation.

A hand was laid on his shoulder and he looked into the face of Mr. Hartwell, grown kindly. There were words about "sympathy, my boy, in your bereavement," and an added "come into my office a moment."

"The last time I talked with you," said Mr. Hartwell, when they were alone in the panelled enclosure, "I was, perhaps, a little hasty."

Did great men apologize, then?

"I have a hot temper, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, it escapes me."

Mr. Hartwell was evidently embarrassed. The confusion and the apology were difficult for him. Gail felt sorry for him. He, too, was reddening, perspiring, sympathetically.

"I want to say, too, that I have found myself in error regarding your ability. I have had an opportunity to examine some of your work. I want to congratulate you. I want to tell you that you have developed a creative ability that, I confess, I had not expected. In fact . . ."

Gail moved his arm to cover the copy of *The Hour Glass* sticking from his pocket. Creative ability! So J. Simpson, the book salesman, could recognize creative ability! At the bottom of his heart there was a spot untainted by "selling values," where literature could be received and understood! And J. Simpson, understanding, saw as Gail had seen, a vision of the Works of Winbourne ranged on the shelves; he had apologized; he was talking to Gail in his "author" manner; he would make him a proposal.

A novel? Gail could do it. A series of novels—to be bound some time in half morocco with the name Winbourne in gold repeating itself down the backs!

Perhaps he would refuse. Bag and baggage! Probation! Perhaps he would hurl those words in his employer's face and walk out of the room. Yet, after all, Mr. Hartwell was pleasant enough—with an occasional burst of temper, to be sure—and as Gail looked now over the broad face with its little imperfections on each of which, in proud and injured moments, he had dwelt with burning scorn, it all seemed cleaner, more decent, human, mellowed.

These fancies and contemplations multiplied in Gail's mind while J. Simpson droned on in his conventional phrases—"a real talent," "stick to it," "I knew a man who," "top of the business," "no limit to the possibilities"—and he missed much of his employer's advice, but he was caught up suddenly when J. Simpson brought the flat of his hand down on the edge of the desk and said:

"By God, if you keep on turning out stuff like that, they'll be after you in the agencies."

Gail felt something collapse in him. The agencies? He had the feeling of a man who, looking out of the window at unfamiliar country, realizes that he has taken the wrong train.

"The agencies?"

"Of course, the agencies. They want men with your creative gift. Naturally I can't pay their prices. Nobody in the publishing game can, understand. But you'd rather stick to publishing, of course; like it better, naturally, salary nothing to you, except in a general sort of way; I mean you're the type of man who prefers the literary atmosphere, understand?" He moved his hand in a sweeping gesture indicating the literary atmosphere. "Am I right?"

"But the agencies? But my story——"

"Story? Story? Call it that if you like. I call it damn fine selling copy. Wait till you see it in print." J. Simpson made one of those gestures peculiar to men accustomed to wield power from a mahogany desk, and pressed a button concealed under its edge. Nero in the Coliseum thumbed down the Christian martyrs with a gesture less imperious.

"But, sir," Gail began, seizing the copy of *The Hour Glass* in his pocket. Something kept him from speaking further. There was a mistake about the whole thing. The door opened quietly and a passionless female head appeared.

"That proof of Mr. Winbourne's."

The face vanished, reappeared, a large rolled sheet was placed on Mr. Hartwell's desk, and the door closed quietly.

Gail felt the roll thrust into his hands. The paper had a smooth, finished, unfamiliar feel. It was not his. It would have been impossible for him to have had anything to do with this shiny orderly thing that important persons handled with such ceremony. There was a colossal mistake about the whole affair. Suddenly there flashed before him words—red, blatant words—and a faded memory woke in him as of something dreamed years ago in a pleasant, humorous childhood before all worlds.

YOU TOO CAN DREAM

He looked up and down the page. Then he smiled. Oh, gorgeous thing! Cut coupons off your dreams! There, fixed for all time, in hard, solid type. It was tremendous. J. Simpson and his desk and his panelled office faded, and Gail burst out laughing. All his pent-up pain, the blackness of life, fled before this excruciating thing. It was incredible.

But Gail's laughter was short. In the midst of it he caught J. Simpson's astonished eyes. The whole wide face was blank with amazement. Then it reddened. The neck between the collar wings reddened and swelled. The walls closed in on Gail, and he looked down at his feet and shifted them nervously.

The flat of Mr. Hartwell's hand came down on the edge of his desk.

"Well!" he said. "Well, well! You seem to think it funny!"

It was no longer funny. Nothing in the world was particularly funny.

"Why no, sir," said Gail, without looking up. "But you see, I just did this as a sort of joke. I didn't mean it, really. When you spoke just now of my—my creative ability, I thought you meant my story—my story, you know, in *The Hour Glass*."

"I don't know. I don't know what you're talking about. I thought you had done a good piece of work, but I see now that it was an accident. A joke!" The neck swelled out. Then a sort of spasm contracted it, and Gail saw a great effort at control come over the broad face. There was a strained silence, and at the end of it J. Simpson spoke quietly enough:

"I can't understand you, Winbourne. I can see your ability but I cannot see your attitude. With your attitude it seems to me that real success will be practically impossible for you. You seem to be unable to take anything seriously. No man can succeed who doesn't take life seriously. You're old

enough to know that. When I was your age I was working nine and ten hours a day, hard, grinding work, and no fooling, I can tell you—I had to, God knows—but you can see where it's brought me." He waved his hand toward the panels. "If you could learn to buckle down you too could succeed."

"I too can dream," thought Gail.

"If you could get it into your head that life is real, and earnest, and that nine-tenths of it is work, hard, serious work, with your coat off and your sleeves rolled up, you might make something of it. By God, I can't understand this younger generation! They don't know what work means. Here you are, young, healthy, with live-wire ideas and the makings of a real go-getter, and look at you. No concentration. No capacity for strenuous effort. No serious thought for your future. One of these days you'll wake up and find yourself a failure. Then you'll get up and try to close the stable-door when the horse has gone.

"Not that I object to reasonable recreation. Nobody knows better than I that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. But there's a time and a place for everything. Work hard while you work and play hard while you play—that's my motto. Look at me. Nobody enjoys a good game of golf better than I do. But when I'm in my office I work." The hand came down again. "Look where it's got me!"

There was a moment's silence. Then, in a softer voice, he said:

"I should think your recent sorrow——"

Gail straightened and the blood came into his face. His hands closed. All the sense of his relation with his chief left him.

"If you don't mind, sir, we'll leave that out."

J. Simpson's face receded and all the room went out of focus. The whole affair became infinitely little and inconsequential. A flood rose up in Gail and he felt greatly strong.

"I know as well as you do," he said, "that I'm not fitted for this business, or any other business. If I stay in it I shall fail; my temperament fits me for just one thing. For a long while I've made up my mind that when circumstances made it possible I would get on my own and do my own work."

The tide ebbed. Gail was suddenly empty and weak. A trembling came into his knees.

"What is your work?"

It was the unavoidable question. Gail's throat tightened. He felt as if he had swallowed too quickly and lost the power of speech.

“Writing,” he said, his voice breaking into a falsetto.

“What?”

“Writing.”

“I beg your pardon?”

The face was large now and near.

“Writing, sir. Fiction, books, stories——”

He waved his hand vaguely toward the shelves of leather bindings.

The face went blank a moment, then the corners of the mouth drew down slightly in a hardly perceptible contempt. Thus, strangely, do men who make physical books sometimes look upon the gods who breathe into their paper bodies the vital breath.

There was more talk, Mr. Hartwell booming about the “business” of writing, Gail arguing weakly about his temperament. In the end the question hung; Gail was to “think it over.”

Days passed, useless, unhappy days. Gail thrashed over his broken interview and sweated with shame. “Why did my voice crack when I said ‘Writing’?” he asked himself. He stood before a mirror and repeated “Writing! writing!” with great boldness. There were even moments when he said “Writing?” interrogatively, and wondered. Perhaps it was all fancy. He was the kind that could think himself into anything. But then, that was the kind. Did the flame burn with the clear bright light? Gail thought of little clear flames. There was the candle flame. That flickered and smoked. There was the flame in the gas-range where he cooked his coffee. That was a strong flame, but it was blue—a cheap sort of flame that was cooked over. There was the blow-pipe flame that workmen used in factories, that roared and burned through steel. . . .

But after the days of questioning Gail would look out the west window and the strong faith came back to him with the fresh wind that blew back his hair, cold, thrilling waves swept down his back, his chest swelled, he breathed deep, his eyes looked level out over the fading city, out over the Golden Soap sign—freedom, green valleys, clean winds, the earth in genesis, creation; throbbing, passionate ecstasy of creation. . . .

And one night as he stood thus a heavy step in the corridor behind him interrupted his revery. The office was empty but for that heavy step; the little stenographers had fussed over their hats and paint-boxes and gone, and J. Simpson stood alone in the doorway. Gail, seeing him as he turned from his contemplation of freedom, was fired with high resolve.

“Mr. Hartwell,” he said in a voice that would have carried far across footlights into a vast audience that was held, thrilled, by his words, “I have decided.”

For an instant there was hush in every corner, the suspended hush that follows moments too great for words; then the audience burst into mad, frenzied, riotous applause; they stood on their seats and threw their hats in the air, cheered, shouted, pounded on the floor. . . . But J. Simpson merely smiled, slightly, and extended his hand.

“God bless you, my boy,” he said. “I shall think of you often.”

The footlights went out. The curtain went down. Gail and J. Simpson stood alone on the stage that was no longer a stage. He felt little and ashamed. J. Simpson had acquired a sort of nobility in his eyes. Poor, patient, kindly man.

“I’m sorry to go,” said Gail in his throat.

All this flashed by in the rapid manner of retrospect while the night came down closing about the edges of the lake; stars now had arrived in multitudes and, too many and too dignified to laugh, had settled into their habitually indifferent expression. There was chill with the night and the north wind, and Gail shivered a little, shaking off the past, and walked with long stride down the empty, winding road.

II

THE settlers of the middle of New York State, more soaked in ancient history than its present inhabitants, encumbered its tiny towns with names of much dignity and tradition. Valerius is there, and Claudius, Horatius, even Nero, black rogue, his memory immeasurably softened in this sleepy, sloping village; Marcus Aurelius, Pliny; hamlets for the most part, often but crossroads, and adding little fame to their historic patrons. Few of them are known even by name beyond the county; few are invaded by city folk or industry; they lie forgotten, going about their gentle businesses unboomed, unboosted; innocent of wealth, machinery, movements, campaigns, or country clubs.

In the midst of these, however, lies Glenvil, a lapse from the ancient dignity into the American picturesque. Whether from its name, more luring, or its lake, or its availability by railroad, or the enterprise of its inhabitants, the fame of Glenvil has been further bruited and its innocence has been miscellaneously invaded. People have come from New York and Washington and built them estates with hedges and lawns and boat-houses round its lake; about these, like satellites, have clustered the "summer devils," ungratefully so called by the natives, whose prosperity they have established. The summer devils lodge and board up and down the two main streets in square, white houses, elm-shaded; there they play their bridge and concoct their scandals; the young people picnic, swim, dance, and break each other's hearts; the old people rock and knit and "watch the young people enjoy themselves"—that perennial amusement of the shelved.

Upon a street of Glenvil Gail looked out in the sunny morning. He had slept long, without dreams or wakings. Outside a night rain had nicely washed the trees, and sunlight was everywhere. Opposite was a square white house. On its piazza a woman rocked and knitted. Down the street he caught a glimpse of another piazza with a woman rocking and knitting. Down-stairs on his own piazza he could hear some one rocking, with feet coming down in unbroken cadence.

Why had he come to this white, clean, civilized place? Everything was so square—almost like the city he had left. Only here these rocking women would say good morning, and ask him questions. People in the street would look at him, inquiring why he was here. Some one in the city had advised it

as a quiet "vacation place." People in the city came to places like this and made cities of them. Why had he not sought out some lonely farm? He had been afraid of farmers, afraid of the look on their faces when he would say —as he eventually must—as he always must—that word "writing." And these people? These knitting women? They would say "Ah!" and clasp their hands, and the young people would say "Really?" and run away from him.

He looked about his room. It was very neat; a white wash-stand and china equipment ornate with vermilion peonies; a table with blue blotters and pens, and note-paper stamped "Glenvil, N. Y." There he should create. There, at that blue-blottered desk. Why had he come?

He dressed quickly and went down to the dining-room. It smelled very clean and fresh. There were an elderly couple and a table full of clean, white-dressed, bare-kneed, brown-faced children, who laughed incessantly. In a far corner sat a large woman whose eating was interrupted by the readjustment of her pince-nez, which kept falling off and hanging over her large pigeon bosom by a string. Opposite her sat her daughter, with dark, straight hair, cut in the prevailing bob, and eyes slightly mocking. Gail felt the mockery of her eyes from the instant he entered, and began to dislike her. How they would mock, those eyes, when she knew. . . . "Writing." . . . She laughed now—a sudden, tremendous laugh, as if she had read his thought.

Gail explored the town, got him a box at the post-office, and was properly cross-examined by the postmaster. In return he learned that the postmaster conducted a livery-stable as an avocation, and would rent out a riding horse by the month or season.

So the mail was neglected and Gail was shown a little bay of cayuse ancestry, and given instruction about his mouth, feet, and habits; about the roads "hereabouts"; about the history of the town, its inhabitants, its climate, its "sesh fectry," and its "kennin' fectry"; its politics, its bank, its stores, its school, its attitude toward prohibition, till the morning was gone.

In the days that followed Gail took long rides on the pony, who fulfilled all promises, over quietly beautiful country; worked out the scheme of the land with maps and wayside questions, and explored wood trails and grass roads and little forgotten cemeteries. So opened, day by day, his city-crowded soul. There would be time enough to write. There would be time for everything now. Such freedom is divorced from time.

Yet, at the end of several weeks of this unmitigated liberty, Gail began to discover that the mere exercise of opening the soul was inadequate to his needs. When every road had been learned, and the sensation of riding in the

rain, of supping with farmers, of skirting the lake by moonlight, of stripping himself and his horse in a secluded cove and plunging into the cool water on the horse's back, and other such had been experienced, he grew perversely fretful, and, finally, after a night of self-dissection, arrived at the conclusion that straight freedom was exceedingly disorganizing to the morale.

So, one rainy day, he sat himself down at his blue-blottered table to write. To write! His real, definite career! He must buckle down to it. He must resolve on five hours a day to start; nine to twelve in the morning, two to four in the afternoon. Then a good brisk gallop to give him an appetite for supper; then a little conversation with the people in the boarding-house; nice people—dull, of course—but one must see people. How write about people without seeing them? So he sat down at his blue-blottered desk.

A fly buzzed in the empty water-pitcher. It must be an enormous fly to buzz so loud. Down-stairs on the piazza the chair rocked and the feet came down. Back, down, back, down, back, down. How could she rock so persistently? Back, down. Would nothing stop her rocking? Two flies on the screen. Why did flies stick so to the screen when there was all the room to fly about in? Did they fear liberty that they committed themselves thus voluntarily to slavery? Would they stay always, scraping themselves against the screen until they starved and died? And the one in the pitcher? He had gone into it of his free will, to buzz eternally round and round that circular wall.

Men were like that. Hour and hour, day and day they scraped themselves against the pavements of their cities when all the world lay empty and free about them. Take them out and they flounder unhappily till they are back in their familiar servitude.

Through this rainy day Gail fretted and wrote and thought, and an hour before the time for the brisk gallop he got up, stretched, and ran his hands through his hair. The rain had stopped and the sun was hot. He was soggy, stale. "One cannot create like this," he thought.

The gallop carried him over an old road, up the Stone Quarry Hill and atop it he came on an abandoned house, half hid in a grove. Pulled by that curious attraction exerted by every empty place once lived in, as if in its loneliness it reached out arms to embrace and hold the passer-by, Gail got off his horse, and tying him went up the steps and skirted the creaking piazza cautiously. He tried the windows till one of them gave to his effort, and explored the house. It seemed he had never seen so vacant a place. No relic of furniture, no single forgotten human thing; yet from every wall arms reached forth to caress him. Never had an unliving thing so folded itself about him as that house.

Behind was a half-fallen barn with a remote smell of cows and a near, pleasant smell of wood rot; a delicious blend of forgotten smells, bringing with it a sense of being very young. Everywhere was comfortable brooding decomposition, slow, effortless chemical change of dust settling down into dust, things losing their forms and being absorbed into the earth to sleep long years and grow again in new forms.

The feel of it came back to Gail after the ride home; in the restless night when he lay making his plans for his future—so big those plans in the unlimited night—possessed him again in the morning, when he sat down to his five hours, so that at the end of three of them he had escaped and made his way back to that haunting place atop the Stone Quarry Hill.

So came it that an idea bred, grew and persisted in Gail till he had made of the deserted house a mysterious home; built him a rough table and a seat, and there worked; labored truly, with naught distracting him but the occasional affectionate call to him of the horse outside; labored and reawoke in himself the old tingle; labored and produced—great piles of scrawled paper in his long-dreamed passion of creation.

The month of July passed, in this genial exercise, rapidly, as time passes even in that happy state when there is time for everything. The novel grew, page on page, thousands of words flowed out on the yellow paper; fair words, indifferent words, quick words and dead words, and the writer passed from mood to mood, enthusiastic, deprecating, fretful, prolific, dull. Passages he read aloud to the emptiness of his house, exclaiming with delight or with disgust at the things his pen had fashioned, talking much to himself, rebuking and admonishing. In time the emptiness became alive with the people of his creating; friendly people, but, to Gail's eye in his most conscious moments, too much resembling one another. He had a dream one night during this time of his concentrated work, in which all these people came crowding about him; the same face repeated and repeated; and he awoke to find himself bolt upright in bed, staring wide-eyed and frightened into a mirror. "So that is it," he mused, thinking and rethinking this symbolic dream. "They are all me." A startling and disturbing revelation which might be made with profit, one may suppose, to numbers of the younger school.

August came hot and sizzling with locusts; the earth dried up and the grass burned brown, corn ripened and wheat hung pregnant, cows wandered wide in search of water; boys and girls tennised and golfed and swam and loved; old ladies rocked and knitted.

In the evenings Gail talked with the boarders—mostly old people and children—looked on at their bridge and persistently refused to play, went to bed early and remained an object of mystery in the gossiping community. He

evaded their questions, pretended to be merely summering with the rest, and politely refused to discuss his reasons for not "mixing with the young people."

The young people themselves cast occasional shy glances at him, but, being young, went largely about their own business and ignored him, and he, sometimes with definite effort, did likewise.

There was one, however, he could not ignore. The girl with the dark, bobbed hair sitting with her mother at the corner table, produced in him a sense of constant irritation. During meals he felt her eyes upon him; when he looked up to make sure, the mockery in them would change to deep seriousness and she would become immensely absorbed in talk.

When first he had seen her there he had been half doubtful of this laugh in her eyes; then for weeks he had tried to think it was directed at something other than himself. But lately, since he had established his new workshop, it had become definite and unmistakable. It seemed, now, that she hardly tried to hide it.

Her mother he had met, somehow, looking on at her bridge game. She was a large woman who moved slowly and with great dignity, her head erect. She always turned her head instead of her eyes when she looked at any one. She was at her best, Gail thought, when she looked over her shoulder, in which position she was capable of almost regal pride or scorn. At the end of a string and concealed from her by her large bosom hung a pair of pince-nez, for which she groped when addressed, as if, without them, her hearing were deficient, and adjusted with difficulty to the imperceptible bridge of her nose.

One night, leading the girl by the hand, she descended on Gail and said:

"Mr. Winbourne, I should like to have you meet my stepdaughter, Muriel Gay."

The girl extended a firm hand and shook Gail's boyishly.

"I'm glad," she said; "I adore horses."

Her eyes mocked a little. They were green to-night. Did blue look green in lamplight? No, green looked blue.

"I hope you'll ride mine some time," said Gail, hoping sincerely that she would not.

"Oh, no—I mean—thank you—I'm trying to get mother to get me one. Are they much?"

Gail explained.

“Really? The postmaster? Isn’t it funny in these towns how everybody does everything?”

“Isn’t it? The undertaker sells eggs. Sort of the beginning and the end all at once.”

The girl laughed her extraordinary laugh. It seemed as if the whole of evolution had been devoted to perfecting that laugh, so adequate was it.

“But really, Mrs. Gay,” Gail went on, turning to her mother, “the horses are excellent.”

Mrs. Gay groped for the pince-nez, which had fallen off.

“I beg your pardon,” she said.

“I hope you’ll get Miss Gay a horse,” Gail said, a little weakly. He was saying, as he often did in moments of embarrassment, quite the opposite of what he meant.

“Oh, do, mother!” said Muriel.

“Why, my dear, no one drives horses nowadays. I almost never see a buggy even among the farmers. And we have our Ford. Such useful little rattle-de-bangs, Mr. Winbourne! And you can count on them so—so much better than a horse!”

“Not to drive, mother,” said Muriel, with that vast scorn with which one addresses one’s elders after such suggestions; “to ride, of course.”

“But no one rides, nowadays, my dear.”

“Mr. Winbourne does.”

“Oh, do you indeed, Mr. Winbourne?” Mrs. Gay turned her head. “How delightful. Well, that’s rather different. Of course I couldn’t think of letting you go alone.”

“But, mother, Mr. Winbourne doesn’t want me tagging along. What an idea!” Her eyes were mocking him now, openly. She was laughing at him, jeering, pointing her finger at him, like a child who had caught him suddenly in an untruth, and all with her big, long-lashed eyes whose color was so hard to guess. Then suddenly she had whirled round and was walking to the door.

“Come, mother,” she called back. “We’ll take a little walk in the moonlight.”

For an instant she looked at Gail. Her whole being was laughing at him, yet only her eyes were alight.

Mrs. Gay moved majestically to the door, turned her head, looked at Gail over her shoulder, and said:

“Good evening, Mr. Winbourne. I shall think about the horse very seriously.”

The incident was disturbing to Gail. If he had to ride with this girl, that would be the end of his work in the empty house. Somehow the house seemed less his now. He had an uncertain feeling about it, as if the owner had come back and discovered his usurping. He could not bear this girl's mockery. But there was something more than all this that disturbed Gail after this meeting, something that we write of as "intangible."

In the days after the sense of this something grew upon him in the manner of such imponderables. Whenever Muriel came into the room he knew it, whether or not he saw her, and irritation seized him. It was a very distinct, sudden sensation, this irritation, and he became, after a little, almost dependent upon it. If, for any reason, she did not come into the dining-room while he was there, the lack of this sensation annoyed him. It was not unlike a thrill, in a way; like the mingled pleasant and unpleasant feeling of going up rapidly in an elevator.

It was obvious to Gail that he hated this girl, and he tossed long hours in bed indulging his hatred. "She is a damnably meddlesome person," he said to himself in the fastnesses of his room. "Why can't she go about her play like the rest of the children and leave me alone to my work?" To be sure she had not definitely interfered with it. She had not said anything except silly things about horses. How straight she was! But how supple, too, and graceful, really, in that young, straight-line way. What curious loose woollen things she wore, nondescript of color. All the girls were wearing them now. Of course they looked much better in them, these young, straight, free-moving creatures. Clothes were better than ever before. . . . Damn the girl! What was there in him to be laughed at so? Of course she had not definitely laughed at him. It would be better so, better for her to laugh outright, that amazing laugh of hers!

But the climax was still in store for him. Gail knew it, felt the imminence of it, like a storm gathering "the size of a man's hand" on the horizon. "Something's going to break," he said; "this can't go on."

One morning it broke. He was sitting on the top step of the piazza, just ahead of the woman who rocked, trying to persuade himself to ride out to his work place. He had got up late that morning after one of his sleepless nights—long after Muriel had breakfasted and gone. Not seeing her in the dining-room, he had discovered that the meal was dull, hurried through it, and come out here to fret and indulge his hate. A dozen times he had cursed himself for letting the time go by without working; a dozen times he had leaned forward preparatory to getting up, caught a glimpse of some one coming down the street, and waited. It would be impossible to meet her on

the street, he thought, and perhaps to have to stop and talk. But how much worse to have her find him here!

The woman rocked persistently. Her rhythmic placidity was more than ever upsetting to him. Suppose he should turn and say something outrageous to her. He thought of the shocked horror coming into her face. . . .

Then, suddenly, in the midst of his imagining Muriel came round the corner of the house. She was dressed in white, with a short duck skirt, and walked with a long stride. Her face was serious, and she looked at the ground until she came to the piazza steps, then looking up and seeing Gail, she stopped awkwardly, with her feet apart and her arms limp. For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes.

The spell broke and Gail looked down. He was embarrassed. When he looked back at her the mocking had come back. She was about to speak. She must not speak, Gail thought, or she would say that thing, whatever it was, that she was hiding from him. Perhaps it would be better so. She spoke.

"How are you getting along?" she said, growing suddenly solemn. It was a commonplace thing to say.

"Getting along? Getting along?" said Gail.

"Of course."

"How? With what?" What a fatal thing! How? With what? Those words of his burned in, and he remembered them long after.

"Why with It, of course," said Muriel.

"What, what?" he blurted out, meaning to be irritable, but with fear in his voice. He felt Muriel flash past him up the steps.

"Why, the novel, of course," she called out from behind him. The screen door slammed and laughter thrilled up the stairs inside.

The woman had stopped rocking.

III

DOUBTLESS GAIL'S pony was unable to understand the hard speed with which it was forced up the Stone Quarry Hill that otherwise ordinary morning. Nor why it was left with its bridle on, and untied outside the familiar house on the top. But human ways are unsettled things, and the grazing was good even with the bit in one's mouth, and the pony, atavistically cayuse, felt no impulse to run home, but ate his way about through the grass and whinnied from time to time at Gail. And Gail, inside, was unconscious of all things but his new misery.

His papers were undisturbed, hid in the closet where he had left them. So she had not read them; this much was spared him. She could not have read them and left them so exactly as they were. No woman could do that, Gail thought, out of his little experience. But then she had spied on him, watched him in his throes. "In my travail," he said, half aloud. It was indecent.

The old affectionate air of the place was gone now. It no longer folded its arms about him. It was no longer his. He felt it peopled—not with himself or the creatures of his imaginings, but with spies. Strangers! His little secret, so important to the work of his life, was public news now. At any time the owner—the place had an owner, to be sure, an alien person who knew him not—might walk in and say: "Here, what are you doing in this house?" Gail heard the creak of stairs.

But there was no one on the stairs. Damn the girl! What had he done to deserve this? As if fate worked in such compensatory manner. But this was not fate, it was a malicious child. A damnable flapper of a girl. How young she was! How beautiful! Damn the girl! For beauty goes with kindness . . . or grows? What was that song?

He sat down at last, after much loud pacing of the creaky floor, and tried to work. But his fretfulness was no help to him. He found himself drawing pictures of girls in short white skirts—straight, young girls—and all the time ran through his head the silly song—"for beauty goes—grows—lives," that was it; "for beauty lives with kindness." It was conspicuously untrue. Beauty never lives with kindness, but with malice; never lives at all, really, but changes, like fire, and dies, of course, like fire, in the end. Gail tried to picture Muriel at forty; at fifty—incredible age. Perhaps she would be kinder at fifty when all her beauty had gone! He thought of them both at fifty—he

would be much older then—thought of them looking across a breakfast-table at each other. For thus unexpectedly do our minds function.

There were moments when he wrote "feverishly"; bad stuff, no doubt, though no one is likely to know, as he burned the papers seeking relief. There were moments when he sat with his head on one hand, running the other through his hair in a familiar gesture of thinking. And in these moments always the picture came back of Muriel in white, standing at the bottom of the piazza steps, her feet apart, her hands limp at her side, her eyes looking directly into his and beginning to mock him. He wished he had said something to hurt her then, as she stood there, so triumphant in her mockery. What did he say? She said: "How are you getting along?" He might have said, "Very well, thank you," and got up and walked off. He pictured himself getting up and walking off. One could get up and walk off with a crushing air. Down the street without looking back. Suppose he had stubbed his toe.

But suppose he had merely sat there and said some cruel thing. He ground his teeth. He could not think of a cruel thing that he might have said. But suppose he *had* said some cruel thing, anything . . . bitter, sarcastic. He pictured her eyes, hurt, filling with tears; good heavens, filling with tears—those mocking eyes! Those beautiful, clear blue young eyes! His own filled at the thought. Then he would have looked at her a moment and seized her limp hands, and said, "I'm sorry," very simply, looking straight into her misty eyes. Just "I'm sorry," very simply. She would have melted then, and he would have drawn her to him, unresisting, till her face was very close. . . .

Oh, damn the girl! How could she have hurt him so? How ignorant she was of the sensitive creating temperament, the artistic—no, not that—the subtleties of his feeling. He could never be happy with such a girl. Be happy with her—happy—with her? What was he thinking of? (For thus inscrutably do our minds function.) Why, he hated the woman!

Thus passed the morning, and, in fact, the afternoon. We cannot fathom, least of all articulate, a mind and heart that were so in hate, as it were; suffice it that Gail passed through an ecstasy of misery that rendered him inactive indeed in any pursuit of a now thoroughly terrified muse. In the late day, when the sun was setting, the persistent call of the pony roused him, and he went out, petted it and apologized to it, calling himself abusive names for his neglect of the innocent brute, yet mounted him, nevertheless, and rode off. The bright riot of the sky and the hazy valleys below, with their little lakes catching the red of the sun, thrilled him out of his gloom, and he rode along the empty hill road till the sun had dropped below the hills and a handful of bright random stars scattered themselves in the path of its going.

But when the twilight came down the thrill left him, and he became hungry. Since breakfast he had eaten nothing, and as the state which such deprivation begets comes in time to usurp the most passionate of a healthy being's emotions, he became fretful until he had sought out a farmhouse, eaten and drunk much bread and milk, and part of a heavy apple-pie, watered and fed the pony, and turned back.

Home? Never! The thought of meeting Muriel—too late to-night, but at breakfast again, perhaps on the piazza—was impossible. No, he would stay up here, sleep on the bare boards of his house, or possibly on the ground outside under the stars. The ground outside, when he got back to it, proved better. There would be a light dew to-night; not that it mattered—better if it came heavy and made him ill; better if he died here on the hilltop, under the stars!

He carefully took off the old army saddle with which the ill-fitted stable had equipped his pony, and the blanket under it, patted vigorously along the pony's back to bring back the circulation after the long day; then rolled himself up in the damp warm blanket and endeavored to compose himself.

A multitude of sounds sang round him. Innumerable tiny beasts shouted forth their little joys, unheedful of his pain. Frogs in a remote pool strummed persistently, as if they feared to stop for a single strum lest the whole throbbing rhythm of the orchestra collapse. Gail wished he could take part in some of it. Why had the human creature so divorced himself from this chirping, thrumming, cadenced cosmos? Here he was, longing to be one with a perfect scheme, and lo! he was at odds with the whole of it. A wayward beast, the human; independent to his own hurt.

Thus thinking, and marvelling at the indifference of the stars, Gail became, in time, composed, in the manner of persons who contemplate the universe. He grew, in fact, so composed that, in a little while, youth and nature dominated over human independence, and he slept, thus becoming, after all, a part of the cosmic plan.

He woke from horrid dreams to the chill of dawn. He curled himself tighter in the blanket and put his head under it, but the cold would not be kept out, and after rolling about awhile, alternately cursing himself for a fool and trying to force himself asleep again, he gave it up and uncurled, shivering. He went to his shivering pony and patted it, and imparted to it various confidences, as men often do when alone with horses, knowing they will not be betrayed. Doubtless these confidences dealt, in a general way, with the nature of woman, a subject on which a horse seems, as a rule, to be peculiarly sympathetic, and one on which man, in the early hours, sometimes expresses himself with no uncertain vigor. This done, he saddled

the pony and galloped “into the dawn.” A colossal sensation this galloping into the dawn, and refreshing after a fitful night.

The dawn was in that stage in which gray clouds race over the east sky, and as Gail cantered up the next hill and drew in at the top to breathe deep, the under portions of the clouds were tinged pink, and pale-green sky showed beneath them, growing as he watched. Soon the whole east was rioting in color and motion and change; violet light swept over the hilltops, white mist moved out of the valleys in long whorls, dew gleamed on the trees and grass with many-hued prisms. Gail, tortured by the color, whirled round away from it to face the western sky. How solemn it was, there in the west where the night still hung; solemn and protesting against the dawn! Patient stars stood in the dark blue of it like deep eyes, sorrowful, waiting for the hand of the day to close them in death. Gail pitied them in their sadness, and protested with them at the heedless joy of the coming morning.

“God knows it were better for the night to stay,” he thought.

But, indifferent to Gail and the stars, the morning advanced on its way, and when he had galloped up and down another hill and turned back, panting with the speed, all the sky was blue and the sun stood high. A glass of warm milk at a farmhouse sent life thrilling down his veins again, and by the time he had got back to his hilltop house it was difficult to persist in melancholy. Thus blatantly do such physical affairs as milk and sunrises break in upon, and often entirely interrupt, our most poignant spiritual broodings.

Gail, too, while the thought of Muriel was in no wise absent, found it difficult to feel for her the same passionate hatred of the night before; she had tried to ruin his life, to be sure; to rob him of all the beloved secrecy of his work; to break into his private sentimental place on the lonely hilltop; and yet . . . how pleasant it would be to see her, here in this early morning, standing there in the wind with her hair blowing, awkwardly graceful in that young way of hers, her eyes blue like the west sky where the night had gone!

Filled with such thoughts and an energy bred of the freshness of the day, Gail found it easy to work; pages of his novel “wrote themselves,” and time, of which he was happily unconscious, flew along, and the day drew on, hot and hissing with locusts.

He was interrupted by his pony, who had wandered in its grazing directly under the window where he sat working, and suddenly sent forth into the monotonously hissing air a neigh of such nearness and violence that Gail jumped from his seat with the shock of it.

“Damn you, beast!” he said by way of recovering his balance. “What a hellish noise!”

Then from the road came an answer, long and running down the whole scale of possible sound.

Now there was nothing startling in itself in two horses thus hailing each other, but Gail found himself unnerved by it. In the first place, he had lately grown sensitive of the privacy of his workshop, and here intrusion was imminently suggested. And, furthermore, he had worked long and nervously on a sunrise and a glass of warm milk. He got up and went out the door, trembling.

A chestnut horse stood in the little front yard with its ears pricked forward. Astride the horse sat a girl in white breeches and very new puttees; she sat a little awkwardly, holding the reins tightly, not entirely sure of herself, and somewhat doubtful as to the persistence of her stay in her present position.

The girl, beyond a doubt, was Muriel.

“You!” said Gail.

“Stand by his head a minute, will you?” she said. “I think I want to get off.” There was no mocking in her eyes.

Gail was annoyed. His early vision of her, standing on the hilltop, was quite other than the present apparition. The spectacle of a girl who did not know how to ride, riding, had always exasperated him.

“No, no! Not that way,” he scolded, as, when she was sure of his hold on the horse’s head she began to dismount. “Take his mane in your left hand first. There.”

She got one foot on the ground, but the other she was unable to disengage from the stirrup, while the horse, in the solemnly comic manner of horses at such moments, began moving away from her, so that she was obliged to hop on one foot to keep with him. Gail laughed. It was incredibly unkind of him, but he could not help it. Muriel shook her foot free with a violent kick that sent the horse whirling, then, turning her back on Gail, she walked slowly away. Gail tied the horse to a tree and walked after her. He was suddenly aware that she looked very little and pathetic, very unlike her usual mocking self. Her head was bent. Then he was struck violently with the helpless consciousness that she was crying.

“Good heaven,” he thought to himself. “What shall I do now?” It was not an unprecedented thought in the annals of man. He wanted to call to her. He could not think what to call her.

“Miss Gay!” he said ineffectually.

"Oh, Miss Gay!" Why "Oh"?

She continued to walk. She could not go on indefinitely, Gail thought. Damn it, what should he say?

"Miss Gay, really I didn't mean to laugh. But, Miss Gay, I mean horses have such a solemn sense of humor. I swear I was laughing at him."

She whirled suddenly.

"It wasn't funny," she said with fire in her eyes. She looked, in her white breeches, like a pathetic, angry little boy.

"No, no!" said Gail. "I mean it was—I mean the horse thought so, I didn't; that is, I didn't think you were funny, not a bit, but I thought it was funny that the horse thought it was so funny. I mean . . ." Why didn't he go and take her hands that were hanging limp by her sides, and look deep into her eyes and say, "I'm sorry," simply, like that?

"What I mean is . . ."

"Oh, stop!" She hid her face in her hands, but just before it disappeared Gail saw a smile in her eyes. Yet she was shaking with sobs. Trembling from head to foot. He began to tremble, too, and went nearer her. She turned away from him. He went very close to her—almost touched her—then suddenly he knew that she was laughing, her tremendous, whole-souled laugh.

"Oh," she said at last, weakly looking round at him, "you're a wicked, outrageous person."

Gail thought he had never seen anything so lovely as her face, with tears and laughter in it at once. A sort of rainbow face, he thought, though afterward this seemed rather absurd. He wanted so to go to her and take her hands and draw her to him. . . . He did not, however.

"Miss Gay," he said, beginning something which he probably could not have finished. But she interrupted him.

"How can I learn to ride if I don't learn? I know I don't know how." She was beginning to be angry again. "No one ever taught me. Of course I look ridiculous." She stamped her foot. "I don't suppose you ever were ridiculous?"

"I am always ridiculous," said Gail.

"But, anyway, that's not the point," she went on, not looking at him. "I didn't come here by accident. I didn't come here, as you probably think, just because the horse brought me. I came because the whole town is in a riot about you."

"In a riot," said Gail, "about me? I didn't know I was so important." Gail Winbourne, the writer!

"You're not," Miss Gay answered. "That is, of course, you probably *are*, but it's your horse they're worrying about. The postmaster-liveryman said to me at the post-office: 'Doesn't that Winbourne stay at Flaherty's?' I told him I thought so. ["Thought so," thought Gail.] And he said you and his horse had been out all night, and they were getting up a search party, and I said: 'Don't do that, I think I know where he went. I think I overheard him say he was going to stay all night at a farmhouse out by Cassius.' 'That may be,' the postmaster said; 'he didn't say so to me.' 'Well,' I said, 'I know he'll come back.' I lied, you see, a little, but I didn't want . . ." She stopped. She didn't want the livery-postmaster, or any one else, to know about his house! It was their secret. Gail felt a melting of his heart. She had done this for him.

"You see, I knew," she finished simply.

"How did you know?"

"Because I found it. In my Ford. I love empty houses, and I always explore them. There was something fascinating about this one." Gail shivered a little at the word. Fascinating!

"I might as well confess, I suppose. I was very innocent. I found it. I mean It. I read some of it. I thought it was an exciting mystery to find a manuscript in an old house. But then I found a letter addressed to you. . . . No, I didn't read that."

Good heavens! thought Gail. An exciting mystery. Manuscript found in a house! His poor novel. He rebelled at the thought. His heart hardened against her and, doubtless, the hardening showed in his face, for she came very near to him and looked into his eyes, and there was a new springing of tears into hers. Then she made a little helpless gesture, and in doing so her hand touched his, and for a flashing instant, he thought, closed over it.

"I'm sorry," she said simply.

On the way home, which they rode together, Gail gave her a long lesson in horsemanship.

"Don't lean forward," he kept saying, getting very professional. "Your balance is gone the moment your centre of gravity is ahead of the horse's middle; now, on the trot, don't rise from the stirrups, let the horse throw you up. You'll get it soon. It'll come suddenly, and it feels just like the syncopation of jazz, like this; see, I'm sitting close, pum-pum, pum-pum, pum-pum, pum-pum; now watch: pum, pum, *up*, pum-pum, *up* pum!"

After a few moments of silence she suddenly called to him.

"I've got it! I've got it! Gail!"

A new thrill leaped through him at the sound of his name. It was the first time she had spoken it.

"Look, Gail!"

Gail looked at her and forgot to notice that she was posting.

"Why don't you tell me it's good?" she said breathlessly. "See!"

"It's tremendous," said Gail.

"You're laughing at me."

"No! On my word! It's exactly right. Go ahead a second till I see how it looks. There! Perfect!" It was remarkable what a poise she had got.

They took a long way home, through woods, walking much, "to cool the horses," as Gail said; the horses cooled and grew sleepy; too sleepy even to wonder at the strange changing moods of their riders. Gail and Muriel talked about horses—an unlimited subject; they talked of the woods; they talked round the edges of intimate things; they grew silent; they walked through long intervals of silence.

Back in his room a great exhaustion came over Gail. The one glass of milk at dawn had used its life-giving properties in supporting him through a most unusual day. The fitfulness of the night claimed toll upon his body, and after a moment's dizziness he fell back on his bed and slept.

It was night when he woke. He was conscious first only of a great coolness, then of a freshness of mind and body and senses. He sat up in bed and caught, in the faint light, the image of his tousled head in the mirror opposite. He laughed. He laughed a long, delicious, quite unreasonable laugh, as if all the world had become immensely funny. Then he talked aloud to himself, saying many incongruous things; a monologue not, probably, without precedent in the astonishing records of this absurd, if human, race.

IV

WRITERS, writing of their writing, as, by an inquisitive world they are sometimes required to do, often to their hurt, give the impression that the living and recording of life are separate operations, seldom simultaneous. However this may be, in the month that followed Gail's ride with Muriel, literature languished in the empty house atop the Stone Quarry Hill. In fact, it is doubtful if a single word were added to the thousands accumulated there.

In the midsummer month that followed, Muriel learned much of equitation. She acquired a hand surprisingly light, a seat surprisingly poised, a quick adaptability to changes of gait, a ready sympathy with sudden varyings of horse moods, and a persistence in the saddle after unexpected shyings. True, these things were learned not without accidents; the accidents as a rule, however, were not even painful, and recoveries were made not unhappily.

In such a school, on quiet wood roads, a relation grew not conducive to immediate literary achievement. There were, too, long twilights on the lake; the exploring of remote, dark coves and inlets; the landings on forgotten beaches; the drifting home in the hushed march of the moon.

And one night words were spoken, old words, astonishing new, and the world changed. Curious, after that, that the earth should pursue, so indifferent, its orderly round; that suns should rise, and people walk unaltered in the streets, and comedy and tragedy still skip and stalk their parallel ways, and the cosmos go so cold about its business?

Yet these things persisted, and Gail, possessed of a normally self-adjusting mechanism, became accustomed to the cosmic indifference, came, in time, to ignore it; he, and Muriel, too, became accustomed to each other's nearness; to the incredible new state of their relations; so that they could kiss without immediate translation into an unnumbered heaven; so that the touch of hands became, in fact, the touch of hands, like the yellow primrose in the poem.

Not that they loved less—God forbid!—but they found interests in each other beyond the calling of soft names and the uttering of new repetitions of old words; their sense of humor recovered from the paralysis into which it

must always be thrown by such climaxes; Muriel told her short and uneventful life in much detail, and was rewarded, in turn, by the philosophy and thoughts, grave and gay, of Gail Winbourne, Author.

They discovered, in these recitations, strong bonds; coincidences; countless evidences that they had been primarily ordained for each other. Gail found Muriel a perfect listener, encouraging him to talk about himself, laughing her splendid laugh when he said funny or whimsical things. She demanded that he read her all his writings, and several expeditions to the empty house were begun, but somehow never completed, so luring were things outside. He told her the story of his novel, and she criticised and suggested, but largely praised. In talks like this he realized how very young she was, vastly younger than himself, so that it seemed almost wrong to ask her judgment on so sophisticated and weighty matters; at such moments he took her tenderly in his arms and kissed her, almost as he would kiss a child.

"You are so young," he said.

Then she mocked at him.

"Old, old man!"

"But I mean you lose something. You do. Something of that wind-blown quality."

"And age is like a paper-weight, keeping you there. All you can do is flutter! It *is* hard, isn't it?"

"But you will take it off?"

"And let you blow away? Never! I'll put another on. Oh, you're doomed now, poor man! With youth and age both holding you down you won't even be able to flutter."

Gail laughed, thinking how delightful it would be to be held down thus.

Eventually, however, they came to talk of practical things. There must be an announcement—a ring—dull details to Gail, but waking new light in Muriel's eyes.

"And I must tell mother."

"And I must talk to her," said Gail. The dread of it grew on him. Mrs. Gay still supposed him to be a mere summer boarder. Doubtless she thought him a man of importance in his world, having this long summer for his leisure. She had treated him with more than ordinary respect and politeness. Gail wondered how far her respect would continue when she discovered his real occupation. As he thought of it now, he feared the look of suspicion that would come over her face when he told her. It was not a new look to him. Immediately after it came the groping, incomprehending question, "What do

you write?" as one might whisper to a suddenly confessed thief: "What do you steal?"

Gail remembered that she had looked half-smiling at him over her shoulder the morning after their evening on the lake, though later she had scolded him for keeping Muriel so late. But why had she looked so tolerantly smiling at breakfast?

"I have told her nothing, nothing," Muriel said, and a little look that was half fear came into her eyes.

But now they must tell her, and he must talk with her. "Mrs. Gay, may I have a little talk with you?" One always "had a little talk" on such occasions. "I want to speak to you seriously about something." No, not that. One spoke at such times of "your daughter," not mentioning her name. One asked for her hand, as if it were a detached thing, to be incased in a plush box and presented to him. Gail, musing about this one day on horseback, laughed aloud.

"What?" said Muriel.

"I was rehearsing asking for your hand."

"Oh," said Muriel. There was no responding laughter in her voice.

There came long silence after that as their horses plodded on dreamily. At last Muriel said:

"You know, dear, I've told her nothing about you." There was a faint trembling in her voice.

"Oh, I'll do that," said Gail. "I'm a writer. Good heavens, what a confession! What'll she do then?"

Muriel ran her hand through her horse's mane, smoothing it over on one side.

"I don't know," she said. She was very serious.

Gail laughed loud and the horses' ears stood up. He stopped suddenly, hearing no response.

"Why, darling, don't you think it's funny?"

Muriel did not think it was funny. She smiled a little, the mere gesture of a smile with fear behind it.

"I don't know. I don't know," she said. "You know, mother is a very conventional person. My own mother was different. Of course my own mother was old-fashioned, but broad, too, in a way."

Broad! Broad enough to tolerate a man who wrote. Something broke in Gail. The laughter was gone from him.

"Broad," he said mechanically. Muriel looked up at him, feeling, as a woman often does, his hurt.

"Why, Gail!" she said. She put her cool hand on his wrist. "Gail! I didn't mean it, Gail! What have I said? You know how great I think it is to write! Why, there's nothing like it in the world. But you see mother—and my own mother—you see, we've known so few people who wrote. And the ones we've known had some business, too. . . ." She stopped, suddenly conscious through that intuition, in which women are so gifted, that she was hurting him more with the succession of her words.

"Amateurs," said Gail. "Oh, yes, I know it's a game. A perfectly respectable game as long as it is kept in the realm of sport, where it belongs. Like golf. Become a professional golfer and your status is gone."

Muriel, not entirely understanding, expressed herself in the manner of women who do not entirely understand, and Gail was wrung by her tears in the tortured way that men have been wrung since sex began. So he dried her tears and made her laugh through them, and they recovered from their first "lovers' quarrel" in the usual way that makes these things such happy tragedies after all.

Yet through that afternoon and into the deep of the night, and of other nights to come, an ache continued in Gail that was slow healing.

With the persistence of the earth's revolving it became more and more inevitable that Muriel should speak to her mother, and that Gail should talk to her. So, one morning after breakfast, Muriel, passing his table, at which he sat alone, bowed to him with a careful "good-morning" bow, and whispered: "I've done it." A little chill swept over Gail, as if, after he had been watching some perilous acrobatic feat, some one had turned to him and said: "It's your turn now."

He remembered standing nervously on the sidelines of a school football game, sweating in his cumbersome costume, when a man ran off the field and the coach held up a finger to him. It came back to him, flashing now, with all the sense of it, the biting air, the clear green of the field, the weakness of legs and breath in the short run, the crowding reek of straining bodies. He laughed a little at the thought: "This is worse," he said to himself. Then, seeing Mrs. Gay rise slowly from her table, he was beset by fear, and fled to the safety of his room, locking the door as if, for example, she might pursue him there.

He flung himself on his bed that was still dishevelled from the night, and endeavored to think out the ordeal before him. He ran his hand through his tangle of hair again and again. "I write," he said. What a meaningless word!

He spelled it out. W-r-i-t-e. Why the *w*? Why any of it? Oh, it was just a word. Like play or read or think. Suppose he said "I think." He did, of course. He pictured himself sitting naked, fist pressed to his forehead, elbow on knee—"The Thinker." Suppose he said "I read," or "I play"? The words of the dormouse came to him: "I sleep when I breathe."

The fly buzzed drowsily in the pitcher.

Gail got up, strode with two steps to the wash-stand, and drowned the fly. Then he walked to the mirror and stood in a bold posture.

"Now I am ready," he said. He looked rather tremendous, he thought, with his flaming eyes and the muscles of his neck rigid. Forgetting to brush his hair, he rushed down-stairs.

At the end of his headlong flight he nearly ran into Mrs. Gay, who was just turning to come up.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I *beg* your pardon."

Mrs. Gay looked at him a moment and laughed, an absurd little laugh that began very high and ran quickly down the scale.

"How you frightened me," she said, and laughed again as she proceeded up-stairs.

Gail was seized with the fear of her escape. He felt almost that he must tackle and throw her there on the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Gay," he called. Why did he always begin with Oh? Out of the corner of his eye he recognized the rocking woman and saw her move out of the drawing-room toward the piazza where her rocking was. Mrs. Gay half turned on the stairs, looked at him over her shoulder with infinite dignity, and groped for her glasses.

"Did you speak to me?" she said, when she had found and partly adjusted them.

"Why, yes," said Gail. "Why—Mrs. Gay, I'd like to speak to you some time."

The rocking woman had closed the screen door, but she stood a moment just outside it as if breathing deeply of the refreshing air.

"Well," said Mrs. Gay, "there's no time like the present, is there?" Gail supposed that this was true. Mrs. Gay turned and came down the stairs very slowly. Gail wanted to push her along. How can she be so slow, he thought, at a time like this? She opened the screen door and held it for him. The rocking, but newly begun, halted as they went out.

"Good morning, Miss Upton," said Mrs. Gay.

“Good morning, Mrs. Gay,” said the rocking woman. “What a lovely morning it is! The air is so crystalline pure.” She said the word “pure” with great delicacy, drawing it out as if she derived from its utterance a quiet delight. “See how every little blade of grass and every detail of the trees stands out! Even in the distance, how clear it is! And the colors are *so* exquisitely refreshing on these sparkling mornings.”

“Exquisite,” said Mrs. Gay, seizing on the word. “I wonder if you have met Mr. Winbourne?”

“Ah, no, I think not,” said Miss Upton, extending her fingers slightly toward him. “Though, of course, I have seen him often, often. But then these young people are so busy in the long bright summer. They have no thought for age.”

“I don’t believe in age,” said Gail, wondering immediately after why he had said it. But Miss Upton was delighted.

“How beautiful!” she said. “Of course youth must not heed the passage of time.”

“Time is a convention,” said Gail, a little angry. Mrs. Gay’s laugh ran down the scale.

“How delightful!” she said.

“How young!” said Miss Upton. And, as if in proof of her having outlived such pleasing philosophy, she consulted a tiny jewel which hung about her neck.

“Ah, the post is in,” she said. “I must go down. Our little daily event in this quiet haven.” She rose, gathering her knitting and dropping a needle, a ball of yarn, and a handkerchief.

When she had gone Gail said, quickly and without preliminary:

“I suppose Muriel has told you.”

Mrs. Gay, not equal to the sudden transfer of thought, looked at him through her glasses and said:

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said,” said Gail, “Muriel has told you, hasn’t she?”

A vast gravity came over Mrs. Gay’s face.

“Yes, Mr. Winbourne, she has. She——”

“I love her,” interpolated Gail.

“Yes, yes, of course,” Mrs. Gay went on. “Of course you do. And she cares for you, I think. But she is so young, Mr. Winbourne, so young. I hardly think a girl knows what she thinks at that age. And Muriel has always been so—well, so scatter-brained.”

“I have not found her so,” said Gail, flaring up.

“Oh, naturally; you understand, Mr. Winbourne, I love my stepdaughter very dearly. Very, very dearly. She is all I’ve got.” She spread out her hands, revealing that she had, indeed, nothing else. “In fact, I love her so dearly, Mr. Winbourne, that all I care for in this world is her happiness.”

“I will make her happy,” said Gail.

“Ah, that is what we must talk about. You have always seemed to me a nice-appearing young man, and you have been very kind to my daughter. But you must remember, Mr. Winbourne, I know nothing about you. I will be very frank with you.”

Gail shuddered. What an appalling preliminary to anything, this threat of frankness! J. Simpson had said it: “To be perfectly frank with you, young man . . .” Mrs. Gay was going on.

“In the first place, I do not even know your occupation—your business.”

The time had come. Again the chill of fear. It must be got over with quickly.

“I write,” he said.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m a writer—I write stories, novels”—his voice broke—“poems,” he finished weakly.

“Ah!” There was a pause. Gail did not look at her face. After a moment she spoke again.

“Literature is a very fine thing,” she said. “A very beautiful thing. My husband, Muriel’s father, was a great reader. A really omnivorous reader. He wrote, too, a little, in the time he could spare from his business. The insurance business is a hard taskmaster. What is your business, Mr. Winbourne?”

“I am a writer,” said Gail, not able to conceal his irritation.

“So you said, but I mean your, your—well, then, really you’re—I don’t like the term—a gentleman of leisure?”

“Why, no,” said Gail. “I work hard at my writing. It is not easy work. It is just as hard work as any business—harder, I sometimes think, than most businesses.”

“But—excuse me—you earn your living by it?”

“I shall, of course. You see, I’m only beginning. I expect to earn a good income when I get started.” Gail wondered if the interview would ever end. He saw before him a long curving path losing itself in thick, wooded intricacies. Love had seemed so simple under the yellow moon, with the

universe singing its night-song in its natural, easy cadence. Mrs. Gay went on, persistently, her voice growing strident and irritated.

"But you must have an income," she was saying.

"I have ten thousand dollars."

Mrs. Gay's eyebrows went up, and her glasses, which for a few moments had clung miraculously to her nose, fell off.

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

"Not income," said Gail. "I mean I've got ten thousand dollars in the bank."

"But that only yields a few hundred dollars a year. What do you live on?"

"On the principal," said Gail, his voice breaking again. "But that is only to give me a start," he hurried on. "When I get started I will earn enough to support us both. It's like any profession; it takes a year or so to get a start—like medicine or the law. But, of course, I couldn't get married until I get really started. That would be a year or so. Muriel says she would wait."

Mrs. Gay said that she had no objection to a reasonably long engagement; perhaps it was even a good thing, especially where the girl was so young. But there must be some "prospects." Gail explained that a story had been accepted and published. He spoke about his friends in the club of the Anarchs. He told her something of his experience at the Hartwells and why he had left. He told her a little of his father and his painting.

"I know we are artistic people," he said. "It's in our blood, I suppose. I know the world suspects and condemns artists. But it's my life; it's all I have to offer."

He talked with passionate earnestness about his hopes and his work and his career, rising to heights of great dramatic eloquence; then of his love for Muriel, and what she meant to him.

When he stopped suddenly on the words "I love her," he saw the effect of his words in her face. She was groping for something with one little fat hand. After a moment she spoke:

"Why, you've almost made me cry," she said. There was something pathetic about her with her dignity melted and that hand blindly groping. Gail softened toward her. She found an infinitesimal handkerchief, and began dabbing at her cheeks. Then with her other hand she patted his wrist.

"I only want her happiness," she said. "You must not speak so bitterly to me. You have made me very unhappy."

She got up and moved slowly to the door, opened it, and without turning again went up-stairs.

V

If, in the dramas of our lives, we could adopt that facile device of fictional playwrights, writing across the script, "The same: Two Months Later," and thus move rapidly on to the next essential scene, much that seems dramatic waste could be simply eliminated and a higher emotional effect be produced. To Gail, contemplating the further movement of his life, such a formula at this moment might seem exceedingly desirable. A logical point for an intermission had patently arrived.

Mrs. Gay, recovering from his eloquence, began to suspect that the match was not, after all, the utmost which could be hoped for her beloved stepdaughter. Here was Gail, neither a man of business nor a gentleman of leisure; inconsequential in his attitude toward the solid things of life, and Muriel no less so; nowhere was visible enough of that substance, which it was so pleasing to Gail to despise, to support the combination of their irresponsibility. There was Gail's ten thousand dollars "in the bank," as he had naïvely said; that, with Muriel's pittance, would keep them a little more than two years "in the manner to which she had been accustomed." And the manner to which one had been accustomed was obviously the manner in which one must continue to live. The thing was not arguable.

Thus, working it all over in her mind and coming to "her own conclusions," she hit upon that rather comic device of many mothers of separating the lovers for a time, supposing that "propinquity" having been eliminated, the attachment would be pleasantly and conveniently dissolved, as one might dissipate hay-fever, for example, by a deft removal of the hay.

This being decided, preparations were made for an interval of two months without communication—that being Muriel's limit—and the welding of their love was thus adequately secured.

Mrs. Gay, had she all her own way, would have arranged their next meeting in the city, but Muriel, after a delicate sounding of Gail, in the course of which she had seen the look of inarticulate pain come into his face at the mention of New York, wheedled her mother, by much affectionate demonstration, baby talk, and such other artifices of her sex and age, into coming back to Glenvil "in November, when it will be so gorgeous here." And Mrs. Gay, in her delight at gaining her main point, conceded the details.

The week before her going was crowded with intense hours; they loved desperately, grudging the moments of necessary separation; she seemed so utterly his during these quick-moving hours that but for its immediate pain he could have laughed at the comedy of this physical parting. They talked their plans for the infinity of the future, wide-vistaed and unending before them, and the practical details of its foreground; the wedding—a small wedding, with just the family; their home—a cottage right here in Glenvil, with a miniature farm; they disagreed pleasantly and made up their quarrels; they behaved, in short, much like other young lovers whose promises were so secure before them, and discussed the future in the manner of those who live for the present.

At last came the parting at the little Glenvil station. Mrs. Gay, having made the elaborate preparations which women make for such partings, was calm and smiling, calling Gail her dear boy, and showing what seemed to him an unwarrantable appearance of possession over her stepdaughter. It was unpleasantly irritating to him to see them together, here on the platform, surrounded by their things. Things utterly alien to him, yet Muriel so entirely his. Was she so entirely his? The thought smote him suddenly as he watched them. There was pain in Muriel's eyes. The parting, she had told him again and again—was telling him now with her eyes, in which there was the first cloud of coming tears—was unbearable. Yet here was Mrs. Gay, smiling and complacent in her ownership. We must do this, my dear, and that! How she rattled on! How completely Muriel acquiesced in everything she said, replying with her gentle "yes, mother."

The wheezing train rocked in, sweeping all sound before it. There could be no kiss, no demonstration here. Gail watched them walk off toward the train, Muriel looking back over her shoulder; Mrs. Gay's broad back expressing complete concentration on the important performance of the moment. Then both their hands waved together from the window—Muriel's tanned and boy-like, Mrs. Gay's fat and ringed. Mrs. Gay was next the window. Gail wondered, as one wonders at the little details of important events, why Mrs. Gay was next the window. Then the wheeze began, the train rocked, the hands drew back, and the two turned to each other.

When she had gone and the world become empty he looked for solace in his loneliness. The only lure for him now lay in his hilltop house, and thither he rode and grew eager again in the suspended work of his creation. It was easy to forget there. It had always been easy to forget in this genial occupation. The tingle of it seized him anew; came to absorb all his waking

thought and much of his dreams, and the novel grew rapidly, assuming, in the mysterious manner of all growing things, the form and beauty which its creator had planned for it.

But in the evenings, going slowly home in the early dark, it seemed little and unreal and far-sounding in the nocturne of the cosmos. There was no chord in this symphony where it might sound its tremulous note. So grand, so predominating it had been—drowned now. And here, so long forgot, was love, perfect in its intervals, sure in harmony—the *leit motif* of all this rhythmic sound.

As the time drew on for Muriel's return the thought of her began to interpolate itself in the midst of his work. She seemed to be there in the room listening as he read aloud his finished pages, her eyes alight with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Gail," she would say, "I don't see how you do it!"

No, no; that was all wrong. She must be more critical. He tried to think of her being more critical. She would put her head at a little angle and half close her eyes. He tried to imagine her thus. He failed. At the moment he could not bring back her face at all. He took out a little kodak picture. She was standing in her characteristic way, with her feet apart and her hair blown back in the wind, laughing. He stood the picture up before him and read on.

"Do you think this is artificial, my dear, this sentence: 'His loneliness compassed him about, dogged him as he faltered down the little path between the sumachs. Always it was there like a living thing, always just beyond the last turn. His loneliness. An unfriendly creature, dogging, pursuing; a dead shadow'? No, not a shadow! A shadow, my dear? That's bad, isn't it?"

The picture laughed at him. A gust of wind blew open the door and scattered his papers and the picture about the room. He gathered the manuscript on the table.

"Let's not read any more," he said, and held out his arms to her. Tumultuous thoughts rushed across the deeps of his mind like the clouds over the October sky. He was holding her close in his arms; a living, beautiful creature, clinging to him; warm arms about his neck; the beat of a heart in young awakening; clear eyes, still bright with child thought, then dimmed by the pain of joy in the fulness and mystery of love. . . .

But suddenly she was gone. Gone out of his arms, out of the room, out of the world. Cold grew about his heart, and he was infinitely alone in the empty house that shook and rattled and creaked in the wasteful, meaningless wind.

Gail, tearing off the calendar, came at last to the day. There was an irregular red circle round the numeral. Otherwise it was recorded exactly like any other day. Only the irregular red circle signalized it. Gail's circle, scrawled round by his red pencil on the day she went. The ends of it did not meet. It broke all the laws. One end might wander on so, infinitely, seeking forever for the other end, and never finding it; seeking on desolately, unable to complete the scheme according to the law. Here was an intended round, following the motion of the universe but failing to make its necessary connection. Might not a planet fail thus, some time, in its accustomed orbit, and fly on through the spaces till it had set the whole of the plan askew? No, only man, extraordinary, free creature that he was, could make a circle that did not meet. But could he, forsooth, produce unaided a circle that did meet, all parts of it properly equidistant from the centre? An amazing speculation, no doubt.

Gail, long minutes before the time, stood waiting at the station. The usual group lounged indolently about him. A bare-legged boy in a brilliant scarlet sweater sat on the baggage-truck. A blue-overalled yardman leaned against the orange wall of the station and tossed a tennis-ball back and forth with the boy. Two bearded farmers talked politics without gestures. A long cat stalked down the middle of the track, its eyes concentrated on an invisible something ahead of it. Another huddled cat sat against the station wall, her eyes blinking in the sun, and speculated upon a suitably hidden retreat in which to bring forth her priceless gift to the world.

There were no summer devils. It was prescribed that summer devils did not remain in Glenvil after the middle of October. After that the village heaved a sigh of relief and returned to its proper labors of winter.

An age-long wait before the strained puffing was heard afar down the track.

"Bad grade outa Nero," said the boy to Gail.

"Suppose so," said Gail.

"Oh, yeah," said the boy. "Turrible grade. Takes two ingynes sometimes. I've knowed 'em git stuck there f'rourrs. Hourrs nourrs!"

It was not a pleasing thought.

"Seems be mekkin' ut," said the yardman.

"Dunno," said the boy sceptically. "Spectin' summody, Misturr Winburrun?"

How the devil did the boy know him? Gail nodded.

"Mebbe she'll mekkit," said the boy, observing Gail's fallen look.

She made it. There was a satisfied sigh from the engine as it struck the down-grade just before the tunnel. A long minute of silent suspense, then white smoke out of the near end of the tunnel, a shut-off of steam and the metallic ring of the coasting train on the rails. Then a wheeze and the grind of brakes.

A large woman with a basket descended sideways from the single passenger car, moving with infinite slowness. A long-legged half-grown boy in overalls got off, and stood at the foot of the steps looking about him in a lost way as if half deciding to get on again. Behind him, on the platform, Gail saw Mrs. Gay and Muriel waving at him.

"Thank God," he whispered. "Thank God." Then he wondered why he had thus expressed himself. He had never for an instant doubted her coming.

Instantly he was at the steps, pushing aside the overalled youth; then suddenly, impulsively, he had thrown his arms about Muriel and kissed her. He heard a sharp-drawn breath, and looked up to see an expression of incredulous shock on Mrs. Gay's large face. He felt Muriel wriggling out of his grasp. He released her immediately and dropped his hands to his side, reddening painfully. "Oh, Gail, how could you?"

They walked, a little apart, across the platform, Gail with downcast eyes, tingling with shame through the whole of his body. As he passed the boy on the truck he was conscious of a wide grin and a little pantomime; the boy was hugging himself and rocking from side to side. A whispered voice reached him as he went by: "Oh, boy! Mmm-mm!" Gail's hands clinched and he could have killed. He looked up into the mocking face with such fierceness in his eyes that the grin faded and the arms dropped.

"No 'fense, Mister!" Wide, innocent eyes looked at him.

"Why, Gail!" The shrill petulant voice of Mrs. Gay was speaking. "Why, where's the bus?"

"Oh, the bus!" said Gail vaguely.

"Of course! Where is it?" All the little group was watching them with vast amusement.

"Why, you see," said Gail, "they've taken it off, now that all the summer boarders have gone. It's such a beautiful cool day I thought, perhaps, we might walk." It was, however, the first time he had thought it.

"Walk!" The scorn of her tone was indescribable. It was an absurd thought, Gail realized, as he looked at Mrs. Gay's ponderous body poised like a rocking stone on her tiny high-heeled shoes. But Muriel's eyes were mocking.

"Why didn't you bring the Ford, foolish boy!" she said.

"Why, indeed?" said Mrs. Gay, with vast dignity.

Gail felt a small hand on his arm. He looked down into an eager face.

"Want yer Forrud?" the boy was saying. "Want yer Forrud? I kin drive a Forrud! Gimme sumpun I kin show ter Mister Smalley, an' I'll git yer Forrud in two seconds."

"How do you know where it is?" said Gail, not looking into the child's eyes.

"How do I know! Say, Mister!" He spoke with proper scorn. "'S in Smalley's garridge, ain't it? Gimme slippa papurr."

The preliminaries arranged, the boy vanished on a bicycle, his legs flashing round the turn in the road.

Mrs. Gay had seated herself carefully on the station bench, folded her hands, and was looking straight ahead of her with such an expression as women sometimes assume preliminary to saying "It's an outrage!"

"It's an outrage!" she said, as Gail went up to her.

"I know, I know," said Gail. "I can't tell you how sorry I am. You see, the excitement of Muriel's—of your coming, drove everything out of my mind. I forgot that the bus——"

"It's not that alone. Think of your kissing my daughter in full view of all these natives. I cannot understand what has got into you, Gail. I really don't see how my daughter—how Muriel—upon my word, I don't know—" she finished weakly and began dabbing her cheeks with her handkerchief. Some such boyish thought as "Who has a better right?" rose to Gail's lips, but he did not utter it. He stood a moment, helplessly, and then saying, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry. I apologize from the bottom of my heart. I can't do more than that," he left her to go to Muriel, who was standing by herself at the lake shore.

They wandered a few minutes along the damp sand without speaking. They were screened by bushes from the now dissipating group on the station platform. After a silence with only the sound of the quick-lapping waves at their feet, Gail felt her hand close quickly about his and press it to her side.

"Don't be sad about it, Gail," she said. "I loved you for it, Gail. For all of it. For the kiss and the forgetting." Then she turned, put her arms gently about his neck and her head on his shoulder, and, in the amazing manner of women, burst into tears.

This beautiful scene was broken by a shrill whistle, of the kind that is produced by some mysterious combination of two fingers and a boy's mouth. Gail and Muriel dropped apart, and turned to see a small face twisted

in uncontrolled merriment. An exuberant laugh ran down the scale, and Gail, entirely happy, laughed with him, forgetting all his righteous anger at such blatant interruption.

"Get out of here, you miserable little wretch," he cried. "This is a private place."

"Seems to be," said the boy. "Well, your Forrud's here."

Gail reached in his pocket and stretched out his hand to the boy.

"Naw," said the boy.

"Oh, come on," said Gail.

"Naw," said the boy, a look of great injury on his face. "There you go, spoilin' it all."

"Well, you're a grand feller," said Gail. "You'll accept my thanks?"

"And mine," said Muriel, putting her arms about the red-sweatered body and kissing him impulsively.

And as they drove off in the Ford a high voice came to him above the complaining engine:

"Oh, you lucky lucky!" it said.

There had not been much of an evening that night. It was not what Gail had planned. Muriel had been hustled off to a hot bath and bed almost immediately after supper, asking why and protesting like a child, and Gail was informed that she was tired after her long journey and needed rest. One was always tired after a long journey and needed rest. Gail had never been able to understand quite why this was so, but it was a definite part of the formula. It seemed to him that sitting quietly in a Pullman car, reading or sleeping most of the time, was productive of much energy. He always felt on the top of the wave after such an experience. Of course there was all the fuss and worry of it, getting up early, and so on; but what was the worry for, after all? Just a trip in the train! And it hadn't started till nine in the morning. Why the getting up early? Why all this concentration of effort on a simple going from one place to another?

Mrs. Gay, having arranged Muriel's nocturnal preparations, came down and joined Gail before the fire in the little sitting-room. She herself was too tired to go to bed. "At my age, you know, one does not sleep readily." She seemed calm, and had obviously forgotten the trying experiences to which Gail had submitted her.

"In the morning," she went on, with the air of one planning a complete schedule, "you and Muriel must have a long talk."

Gail felt a sudden fear gesturing at his throat.

"Of course," he said.

"She and I have talked things over a good deal," Mrs. Gay continued, smoothing out her dress on one knee.

Things! What things! What had this woman done, coming between their love but knowing naught of it; planting her immovable self on their path to freedom? At the station Muriel had, somehow, been less entirely his. Not that anything had come between them in their embrace. No, that had been a perfect instant. But before, and after. In short, whenever this woman had been present, Muriel had been partly hers. They had talked things over.

"What things?" said Gail abruptly.

Mrs. Gay looked up with shock in her eyes.

"Why, Gail!" she said. "You mustn't speak to me like that! Don't you realize that there are a great many things a young girl must talk over before she can take so—so"—she groped about for a phrase, but settled at last on the one she would have used had she groped an hour—"so important a step in her life?"

"Oh," said Gail, with a little relief. So they had talked over all those things. It was natural that they should. Muriel had no one else to talk to. But Gail's uneasiness had not altogether left him. Nor when, after a few moments more of meaningless talk, he excused himself and shut himself in his room was he quite without it. His insistent fancy led him down a maze of winding paths that turned in and out of each other but brought him, as was the way of his vagrant imagination, to no clearing. So he tossed long in bed before sleep came.

But when, in the morning, he woke late (for youth generally takes its due of sleep) the day was so sparkling clear, the cold vigor of the November morning was so definite, he found that fear had gone with the night. He jumped impatiently from his bed. How far the day had grown during his wasteful sleep! Muriel must be waiting for him. They would ride to-day—up over the Stone Quarry Hill; up to the empty house, and there Gail would light a fire and they would sit long over it, and he would read—not all of it, of course, but little important bits. The prospect thrilled him as he recovered from the shock of his icy bath, and the thrill of it was assisted by warm blood flooding through his body to the tips of his fingers.

Muriel, small and boyish in her riding-breeches, was finishing her breakfast alone when he came down. She poured his coffee for him, scolded him for being late, and explained that it was a good thing for them to be having breakfast alone, because if people could stand each other alone at breakfast, there would be nothing to worry about.

“I know,” said Gail. “I’m impossible at breakfast.”

“I’m especially bad this morning,” she said, “because I didn’t sleep much last night.”

“Neither did I,” Gail said. “Not a wink.”

“Not this morning either?” Her eyes were beautifully mocking. But suddenly all the laughter died out of them; she looked at him an instant and then looked down. The unexplainable fear of the night before came back to Gail. He took her hand quickly.

“Darling!” he said.

She did not raise her eyes. With her other hand she moved things about on the table, then with a hardly perceptible movement of her head, as if shaking something off, she said:

“We must have a long ride this morning. We’ve got lots and lots to talk about.”

Gail’s throat closed and for an instant he could not speak. Then he said:

“Of course. Lots!”

She smiled at him sweetly, and he returned the smile; and in the exchange of those sweet smiles every particle of personality had gone from both their faces; they were as strangers almost; mere acquaintances greeting each other across an immense distance, each suppressing every glimpse of himself that might be revealed to the other. In that instant Gail had buried something; something of the full frank expression of love, and some little bit of himself which, try as he might, he never could bring forth.

Yet much of the sense of their intimacy came back to him with the sound of the hoofs on the hard street, rousing in both of them delicious expectancy; with the reminiscent fragrance of the horse’s body as, bending over to adjust a stirrup, his face came close to his pony’s neck. He looked across at her and saw that the space between them had vanished.

“This is our particular kind of day,” she said.

“Let’s go over the Stone Quarry,” said Gail.

Muriel was silent.

“I’ve worked a lot in the lonely house,” he said, “since you’ve been gone. Worked constantly, every day.”

She looked at him with a quick hurt of jealousy.

“Have you missed me, Gail?”

“Oh, darling!” he said.

“But in your work you forgot me?”

“I tried to, God knows,” he laughed. “But it didn’t do!”

Wouldn’t she ask something about his work? There was a long silence while the hoofs struck with sharp delicate sound on the hard, clean street. Gail began again:

“I thought it would be fun,” he said, “to go up the Stone Quarry, and maybe we could start a fire in the old house, and I could read you some of it.”

“Some of it?” said Muriel abstractedly.

“Yes, my novel!” said Gail, a little desperately.

“Oh! Oh, yes! But don’t you think it’s such a gorgeous day outdoors? I mean to shut ourselves in a stuffy old house. Let’s do another hill now, and go up there some rainy day when it’ll be really cosey! It’s so glorious!”

Yes, how glorious it was! In that moment Gail knew beyond all doubt that he would never read her his novel. Never. Perhaps some day she would read it herself, when it was decently and conventionally clothed, but never in its intimate state; never would she see it in its fair, unashamed nakedness, where he had offered it to her alone. Never would they together love and treasure and work over this half-grown child of his, making it, with their combined sympathetic effort, more beautiful in the fulness of its stature. No; those dreams were dead in the instant; not even the warmth of them remained about his heart.

The blow of this consciousness stunned and silenced him. A month since Muriel would have seen his hurt and asked him about it with quick sympathy. Not now. She was deep in her own thoughts.

At the beginning of the dirt road she went into a trot, and the horses, waking suddenly from their reveries, tossed their heads, spread wide their nostrils to drink in the intoxicating freshness, and broke to a gallop, straining against the hands that held them. Muriel’s horse was faster at the gallop and sped ahead of him; she let the reins loose as the pony picked up his speed, and Gail, spurring, followed her down the soft road. It was a spirited gallop, of the kind that had always been wildly exciting to him, yet now it was but a dead, necessary pursuit; he was following this lead as, he thought suddenly, he might follow it through all his life, with little spirit; and the horse, feeling the inertness of his weight, kept up only through his constant spurring.

Yet as he turned a sharp bend in the road, and caught sight suddenly of Muriel’s figure, now well ahead of him, her short hair blown straight back, her whole body instinct with the joy of the speed, the primitive sense of his love, starved in the long interval, thrilled back through him, and his body was new-quickened; the pony, knowing instantly the change, threw himself

into the full vigor of the chase, and soon they were racing abreast on a long flat stretch of straight road.

They were both laughing when they pulled up, laughing out the expression of their physical delight.

"Gail," said Muriel suddenly, while her horse tossed his head and pranced at the abrupt pull on his mouth, "let's get married!"

"Let's!" said Gail, still laughing.

"But no," said Muriel, become very serious after the manner of her rapid changes, "I mean it, really. I can't bear this interminable engagement." A little shudder ran through Gail at the word. Why did people keep saying "engagement, engagement" all the time, using that absurd formal word that meant so many unimportant things, and, in the end, really nothing. One had a business engagement, or a luncheon engagement, an engagement in battle —ah, why that?—a dull word for this spiritual thing of love. A priggish word, he thought, invented in the days when nothing was called by its right name; a proper word, perhaps, for a marriage of convenience; but what had it to do with this? Then it occurred to him that all the words one used about marriage were ugly things: matrimony, for instance; spouse, husband, wife, betrothal; inadequate and unbeautiful.

"Not engagement, Muriel," he said. "I can't bear the word."

"What, then? Oh, Gail, you are so queer about words! But, Gail, can't we?"

"Why, dearest," he said, "you know I want it. But you know what your mother said about my not being able to give you what you were—what you were—oh, you know all that. Of course I'd like to take a chance. I think we could swing it. But I thought from what your mother said we'd better wait—wait till I'd got some kind of a start. She said she didn't mind a long—a long —one of those, if it would help me to get going. You see, my novel's nearly done, and if I could get that over——"

Muriel interrupted.

"Mother and I had a lot of talks about it. I've brought her round to think the way I do. She thinks it would be better for me to marry soon."

Gail's heart leaped up. All the hurts of the morning healed at her words. A tumult of thought came tumbling through his mind.

"Yes," she was going on rapidly. "But, of course, we had to think out a lot of plans. We thought if only you could have some regular income, you know. I know you hate all business things, but I thought some position might help you to get started. Then, we can't help thinking, mother and I, that perhaps it is better for a young man to have something regular—

something solid, you know. Of course you could write on the side. I could help you lots and lots in the evenings. We could work together, or you could work alone because I mightn't be able to help you. Of course I might even irritate you, so I'd let you work alone, really. Then you could get your novel published, and then, of course, you'd be a novelist. That would be different. After a while, if it sold a lot and you got more things started, we could live on it, and you could break off again and be a real writer, with regular work to do. And we could get married." She swung his hand back and forth between the horses. "Think of it, Gail, married! With what you've got we would have a good start, and you see, *then* you would be earning something all the time; not much at first, perhaps, but more and more. And I'd help you in thousands of little ways. Why, Gail, I'd cook for you, or anything, if we had to, though mother says if a young girl does that she loses all her beauty, and then her husband doesn't love her any more. But don't you see, by our scheme—by my scheme—I won't have to cook. Don't you think it's splendid? It solves the whole difficulty."

Women, if Gail but knew it, have an amazing facility for solving whole difficulties in this manner.

"What kind of a position?" he said dully.

"Well, I've thought of that, too. I thought of it all by myself. You know when you told me about your life there in New York, you said that Mr. Hartwell was very enthusiastic about the what-do-you-call-'ems you wrote about the books."

"Blurbs," said Gail.

Muriel laughed.

"That's it. Well, you told me once that he said about the agencies—what they would do if they could see your circular. I know you didn't like the work so much then, but you are so really good at it, I don't see how you could help liking it after a while. And then, things are different now, aren't they? Aren't they, Gail?"

"Of course," he said, smiling a little.

"And now you have a real incentive, Gail. Mother says, too, there are fine openings in the advertising business. A big opportunity for men who know how to write. And it is work that helps you in your writing. And it is a big, coming business, they say, still in its infancy."

She looked at him eagerly, but Gail did not see her face, so absorbed was he in the slow procession of thought that marched, muffled and cadenced, through his mind.

. . . Out of the west window, out beyond the roofs with their tangle of chimneys and water-tanks, and dead electric signs standing like skeletons against the sky, was the misty place where the river was. Somewhere beyond that was freedom. It was a green country filled with yellow sunlight and long shadows, where one moved and lived only on impulse. . . . Somewhere beyond that sign which flamed into light against a darkening sky to announce to the world that "Golden Soap Is Pure."

Muffled cadence of marching thought, muffled falls of horses' feet in the soft sand of the road.

"Soap," said Gail suddenly.

"What?" said Muriel.

"Soap. It freshens forlorn faces."

"Oh, you mean you would write about soap? Well, lots of people do. I mean—oh, Gail dear, I mean it's a perfectly decent, good business. Gail!"

"Yes—I guess—perhaps—we'll see, dear." He paused. "You see, I must think a good deal. Let's think a good deal on this quiet road. It needs some thought, you know, when so vital a thing as soap hangs in the balance."

"Oh, Gail!" She laughed a little, thinking she had won him over.

There was a long silence. The road wound on through stripped woods, over masses of dead leaves scuffed up with a rustling, soothing sound by the horses' hoofs. They came, after a mile or more of walking thus, to a little opening in the trees, whence a grassy lane ran down to a lake deeply blue. The color of it and the mystery and intimacy of the little forgotten road roused Gail from the deeps of his thinking, and lured, half-consciously, he turned his horse down it. The pony drank thirstily at the sandy edge, and Gail dismounted, leaving him loose, letting the reins drop in the water, and stood a long time looking out over the wide space of the lake.

His thought was that of a man come unexpectedly to a road whence two ways led. In it Muriel, in the flesh, had no place; her real presence behind him was forgotten; in it she was merely a symbol for which he fought; fought against another, stronger force, which was himself. And had the struggle been thus alone, in thought, doubtless himself would have triumphed, carrying all before him; perhaps in the end, at the height of his triumph, he would have carried her, too, beyond all argument and jealousy, and Gail, in the future of his early existence, might have both lived and loved. But it was not so ordained. Like many such persons whom we love, perhaps most for their weakness, Gail was not the triumphing kind. In the crisis of his struggle, when hot tears stung his throat and burned round the edges of his eyes, Muriel came to him, drew warm arms about his neck and

his face down to hers, wet with tears and quivering with sobs, and the whole of life faded out in the meeting of their pain, and Gail, with young passion flooding up within him, kissed her and kissed her. . . .

"You child," he said. "You little, unhappy girl."

She was only a child, he thought, a poor, little, crying child. He must protect her; not be angry with her for her happy, running talk. She could not have meant it.

In such moments are we deceived of all things.

For she did mean it. In the wearing on of the day, when Gail clung to his love as the only thing left him in a fast-disappearing world, he knew that she had meant it solemnly enough, and he knew, too, that in the moment of his yielding to her embrace there on the lake shore he had lost the struggle, and that in the time to come his love must stand alone as the essence of his life.

VI

In that whirling comet named with high-sounding American aptness The Empire State Express, Gail sat and contemplated the quick-passing color of the late autumn landscape. Opposite him Mrs. Gay and Muriel sat sleeping, as one is expected to do in a Pullman car. The world outside was brown; rich, red-brown; beautiful, Gail thought, in that beauty of the eve of death. The gay colors of the leaves had faded, grown into a quiet harmony lovelier, perhaps, than in the heat of their revel; and high brown grass grew everywhere, looking, when the wind swept it, like a brown sea.

In the ending of that phase which was marked off by his months at Glenvil, in its last weeks his love had grown strong in the removal of everything else from his life. He was full of the longing for marriage which would, of course, weld in perfect security whatever links of his love were still weak. And after that—well, the far future had always been a dim and difficult affair for him; he had concerned himself with it little, despising those who lived in it, excluding the joy of the living instant. So now he looked out upon the rich color of the autumn fields with satisfaction enough for the hour.

But, in the midst of his pleasure came a threat, cold at his throat. Midway in a valley of high dead grass that waved in glorious undulations of color down a slope between brown hills; midway betwixt the hills with the pale blue of far mountains showing in a curve over the top was a white rectangle of civilization, declaring to a world which might not have believed it had it not been so insistently interpolated into their contemplation of beauty, that a pain in the back means diseased kidneys. In definite colors was portrayed an elderly woman bent over by the agony of the imperfect organ referred to in the text, and on her face a half-comic leer of pain.

Gail stiffened involuntarily in his chair, and a dull ache came and was gone in the middle of his back. Down the car he saw others stiffen so, and one sad-looking old man put his hand behind him, then withdrew it self-consciously, looked back to see if any one had noticed his unconscious gesture, and caught Gail's eye.

And through the world people were stiffening thus at the sight of this bent and agonized body; people less cynical than the group on Gail's Pullman; stiffening and feeling the dull ache in their backs; simple farm

people bent by proper labor of the field, factory people aching from the endless repetition of a motion, stiffening and feeling of their backs and tossing sleepless nights and losing their little hold on life because a pain in the back means diseased kidneys; it says so on the sign.

And so throughout the world are people discovering other ills; that the pores of their skin have stopped breathing; that the joints of their nerves are breaking; that their noses are not straight, or at all events not beautiful; that their livers are not performing; that they are failing to absorb the vitamines they consume; that they are losing their freshness, or their charm, or their hair, or their teeth, or their vigor; that they are suffering from fatigue, overwork, overstrain; that they are walking on their heels or their toes, exercises which, if continued, will plunge them into a decline; for thus does our pleasing civilization interrupt the contemplation of what is left to us of God's perfect things.

And now the continued lines began on either side the tram; the long tentacles of the city, venom-dripping. Gail felt them curling about him, slowly crushing, pulling, twisting, turning, dragging him at last into a vast and iron maw.

With a little shudder he turned away from them back into the car. Muriel and her mother, facing each other, were asleep, with their mouths half open. Mrs. Gay's dignity was momentarily departed; Gail thought of the sudden shock to her pride could she be shown a picture of herself in her present aspect. Muriel was as beautiful in her sleep as in her waking, yet it startled him a little as he looked at her profile, half turned toward him, to see how utterly changed she was from her perpetual animation with all its quick motion; to see how utterly gone from her was life. But Gail had never lost his astonishment at the likeness of sleep and death.

He turned to the magazine on his lap which Muriel had bought for him to "kill the time." On the turning of the cover he was held by the discovery, thus boldly expressed, that "Charm, that will o' the wisp of the personality," so mysterious through the ages, was no longer a mystery. It was, it seemed, inherent somewhere in each one of us, and could we but uncover its hiding-place the whole of our life would change from that moment. He, too, for example, could be charming. He, drab creature that he was, unsuccessful in the big things of life because he had failed to impress on any one the real essence of his personality, wondering always why he was shunned, avoided, forgotten by his friends—even he, by the simple clipping of a coupon, could become "instinct with subtle fascination," and hence a vital force in the world. There was the coupon, a simple triangle of white paper to all appearance, yet possessed of the magic of an Aladdin's lamp. Moreover, it

involved not the slightest obligation on his part; if at the end of two weeks he was dissatisfied, "The Secret of Charm in Ten Lessons" could be returned, and the incident closed. And if, on the other hand—but what, after all, was a paltry dollar or so?

On the next page it appeared that the whole of his skin, from his head to his feet, was populated with an army of living and breathing, eating and sleeping organisms, infinitesimal to be sure, but visible "to the eyes of modern science." Like a fig, he thought, or fine old Roquefort. For years, apparently, he had been starving these poor hungry creatures, and many of them, in despair, had closed their mouths. Once their mouths were closed every sort of misery began. Eventually they no longer wanted to eat, and refused to open their mouths even when food was presented to them. This, then, was responsible for his lost youth. This was why people were repelled by the sight of him. Not even the ten lessons of the last page could restore his real attractiveness as long as these mouths remained sealed.

But ah! Behold the rainbow in the sky! A thorough daily cleansing of Nature's covering with "Poropen," a soap whose lather was of the fluffy softness of a summer's cloud, would cause the parting of those myriad lips; a thorough rubbing in of "Porefood" ointment would restore their nourishment; in the twinkling of an eye lost beauty, youth, freshness came flooding back. The happy flush of adolescence!

On the next page was a pile of steaming griddle-cakes over which a coal-black mammy was pouring a rich dark fluid. But the text was not about griddle-cakes. The heading read: "That Tang of Fresh Molasses." But the text was not about molasses either. It was about tobacco; when one's mouth was filled with the rich, soft, velvety smoke, one felt that tang. One felt it then, because it had been subtly introduced into this especial tobacco, "Tang-O," after years of scientific experiment. The picture of the griddle-cakes made Gail think he had rather feel the tang of the fresh molasses in the direct manner, and that when smoking he preferred to experience the tang of fresh tobacco, but such are the psychological mazes of our refined civilization that we like better to get our sensations in these roundabout ways.

And so on. He learned a good deal about himself and others—most intimate details. There were some things, it seemed, that one would not mention even in the privacy of one's family. Yet there was no objection to mentioning them in full-page displays in a magazine that "entered a million homes weekly."

This, he thought, was his life-work. To this pleasant form of expression was he permanently dedicated. How damnably clever it was! But he could

do it. He could produce more outrageous and amazing things than any of them. He thought for a moment and then laughed. Blessed is he that laughs.

"Oh, God," he thought, in a sudden prayer moment. "Oh, God, help me to think the world and life are primarily funny, otherwise I may think them primarily tragic, which is, perhaps, the fact, but I should certainly die so thinking."

His laugh woke Muriel from her light sleep.

"Look at this," he said, thrusting the charm page before her.

She read it carefully.

"It is rather absurd," she said, handing it back to him with slight trouble in her eyes. Then after a moment thinking:

"But of course you won't have to do that sort of thing. Will you?"

VII

LONG tentacles reaching out through the clean valleys of the earth. The twisting tentacles of our great octopus, to whom we salaam as to a god all-powerful and all-producing; the magnificent golden idol of Buncombe, or, as we have pleasingly abbreviated it, Bunk. And is there one immune from the command or the wrath of the great god Bunk? From the bent drudge of the kitchen and the farm and the grinding mill to Pluto in his marble palace, valeted into his bath and lackeyed into his chariot; is there one of us who does not eat gluttonously of his lies and beg for more; one of us but throws his mite or his million into his jingling and brimming coffers; one of us but buys and buys and saves to buy again, that he may grow fat and wax great; one of us but burns at his sacrifice some part of body, or mind, or eternal soul if such we are persuaded there be?

Comes a plague, and he fattens—stricken men heap gold before him for the relief of his magic cures; a war, and kings and the powers behind them burn Truth before him in desperate oblation that the smoke of the sacrifice may spread out over the world to sift down soot of lies and hate; a famine, and lo! foods are a-plenty if we but hearken to his word; false foods, to be sure, Bunk foods, but at least with the hope and belief of fatness. Beauty, love, hope, hate, fear, all the emotional bag of tricks is at his right hand, ready to his touch; the arts are cringing at his feet, for by him and him alone may they live; nations fall at his whisper; economic structures collapse to chaos at the wave of his hand; Truth melts in the heat of his breath; Charity slinks away at the sound of his sounding brass.

Yet Gail, standing, as it were, on the steps of the Temple, was struck immediately by no such aura of power. In fact, the ground-glass door before which he found himself, a few days after his coming to the city, seemed surprisingly modest and dignified. On it, lettered by an artisan hand, an unassuming legend conveyed the information that B. Minturn Outwater, Adviser in Advertising, Publicity Engineer, might be found within. It was an embarrassed moment, and the door disarmed him. His carefully prepared entrance seemed now unfit. He had said to himself: “Gail, you are a one-hundred-per-cent American. Probably you are a two-fisted he-man. At any rate, those things you will be when you enter there. You must enter as if the world were at your feet. Gail Winbourne, the Live Wire.” Entrances were

important. Yet here was this door. Doors had always disarmed him. Confronted by them, planned entrances became inadequate. A child, he had had what he called the door-bell feeling. It was a species of stomachic revolution followed by an abdication of the brain.

Thus, when he entered, he did so with the air of having come for that purpose for which, indeed, he had come. The straight, small boy, whose hair was so slicked that it looked as if melted gold had hardened on his head, and who stood at attention, barring the way, was not deceived.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a firm treble.

The mahogany walls closed in on Gail.

"Mr. Outwater?" he said, his voice sticking in his Adam's apple.

"Mr. Outwater!" he repeated violently. The boy did not move.

"A client?" he said.

"Client? Client! No, not a client. Certainly not that."

From his hip pocket the boy produced a pad. Thus far his gun-metal eyes had not left Gail for an instant. Gail wondered if he ever smiled or laughed. Would he laugh now if Gail did some ludicrous thing? Walked on his hands, for instance? No, he would not laugh. He would still follow him with those hard steel eyes. Did he play baseball or shoot crap, or do any of the things boys were expected to do? No, he did not do any of these things. He went to bed with his heels together, and without bending.

On the pad was printed:

Name:
Nature of business:
Probable duration of interview:

Then:

Not to be filled in by visitor.
Mr. _____ *is out. In conference.*
At lunch. Out of town. On vacation.

Gail wrote "Gail Winbourne, son of Daniel Winbourne. Job. Five minutes," and returned the pad to the juvenile automaton. He was waved to a chair in a section railed off for visitors.

There were several persons in the enclosure, united in the democracy of a common mission, yet each much withdrawn into himself, and regarding the others, if at all, with reserved contempt. Two boys, the shine of college moulds still on them and the absurd combination of dignity and awkwardness peculiar to their phase, sat moving their fingers nervously.

One, surreptitiously, under a magazine, manicured his nails; the other moved his hand frequently over his superbly slicked hair, never quite touching it; but both were solemnly masked, and cool disdain fell from their eyes. A middle-aged male of uncertain contours and much indiscriminate hair about his face and head fingered a pile of drawings with long, trembling fingers, but veiled the despair of his eyes by looks of businesslike interest at his much-handled creations. A girl, her thin face showing a thwarted intent of nature to make her beautiful, sat remote in a corner, her eyes lowered to the advertising pages of a brightly colored periodical, seemed of all in that little unhappy ante-room of the Temple the calmest, if one but failed to note the writhing fingers of her left hand, white with the pressure of their moving, and the shifting of a little diamond ring up and down, round, up and down. . . .

Gail, observing all this and penetrating, as was his unconscious habit, beneath the masks, thought, "So there are some who want this thing," and, lest his own mask be treacherous to him, looked on beyond into the outer office. There a vista extended a long space, ending in windows and vague city without, and in the vista was a column of mahogany desks. At each desk sat a man with slicked hair and a gray mohair office coat. There was little sound. Calm-faced boys, like the little steely sentinel who had stopped Gail at the gate, moved constantly about, picking up papers from the desks and disappearing with them into a red-lighted "Exit." No one smiled. All movements were silent, serious, reverent; in the presence of the god.

Suddenly the little acolyte stood again before him, made a hardly perceptible gesture, reversed himself in a military manner, and Gail, with proper awe in the soles of his feet, followed him on tiptoe. A heavy door swung back, and Gail was in the inner Temple.

Opposite him was a wide window. There, under a sifting golden haze was the city; all of it, it seemed, and beyond high-windowed towers, softly gold in the afternoon sun, was the harbor and little ships moving out to freedom. So mythical, so unreal, so a dream city in its haze it was to Gail that for an instant he stood in silent thrall before it, forgetting. A little laugh interrupted him, and he turned.

"Nice view, eh? Glad to see you, my boy!"

A hand with immaculate finger-nails extended toward his.

"Sit down and we'll talk."

Gail sat and sank low in a deliciously upholstered chair. For a time the large, gray man at the desk studied him, then the eyes wandered to the window. Then he spoke:

"I knew your father. A great artist. I invited him once to come and speak on art to a gathering of advertising men. I am afraid he thought us too commercial—desecrating the true art. Wrong, my boy. I have great respect for your father, great respect for art, but I cannot think it degraded by application to commerce. Commerce—business—is the very fabric—the warp and woof, I may say, of all our lives."

There was a pause.

"No doubt you have the common misconception about this profession," he went on slowly. "Perhaps you think, as some others do, that we are mere hard-headed business men, greedy, on the make, gold grubbers."

His hand was describing circles in the air.

"No. Mark you, I am thinking aloud. No. In reality we are dreamers. We are dreamers. We are visionaries; men dreaming dreams and seeing visions. Mind you, I am simply thinking aloud. I believe you said in your letter that your propensities were creative?"

Gail acknowledged this.

"Men with creative propensities are needed in this profession. Men who have big imaginations. Men who have the creative instinct. Men who have the expressive faculty. Men who have the desire to build, to construct, to produce. Men who can view big things as a whole. Men who can grasp vast conceptions. Make a mental note of that."

Mr. Outwater was still looking out the window and moving his hand in circles in the air. But suddenly as Gail watched him he turned; every muscle tightened convulsively, the delicate fingers of his hand clinched into a hard, white fist, his face grew taut; throughout his body he was a coiled steel spring, ready at a touch to release itself into irresistible, shattering action.

"But—" he bit out the word. "But, more than all, men of personality are what we need in this profession!" The clinched fist came down violently on the hard desk. "Men of strong, vigorous personality; compelling personality; real, intense, vivid personality; men who can go out into the world and thrill and grip and compel by their personality. Men whose eyes, whose voice, whose manner, attitude, poise reflect their personality; men whose words echo their personality; men whose personality is felt the instant they enter a room, so that other men turn and look at them, and are thrilled and compelled and gripped at the sight of them. Look at me!"

Gail looked at him. It was impossible to do otherwise. The room, the window, the fairy city beyond, all the world faded out before the two flashing eyes, grown white-hot, like steel out of a furnace before him, and he was held immovable, unthinking, as one is held by the eyes of a mesmerist

controlling his will. If all the structure of the world should shatter and collapse about them, those two eyes and Gail's would hang in space looking at each other through eternity. But as suddenly as it had come the spell broke, muscles relaxed, the fingers lost their tension. Gail dropped his eyes and sank back in his chair, suddenly tired, as if he had completed some gruelling physical exertion.

"What have I done?" the voice went on gently. "First, I have dreamed. As a boy I dreamed of the betterment of humanity. As a young man I dreamed of educating the people, the masses, the unwashed creatures of the streets, the mills, the crowded tenements; dreaming of bringing some hope of cleanness, of better conditions into their unhappy lives. To make the world clean!

"Then the opportunity came. The advertising business, as it was called then, before it was entitled to be listed among the professions, was in its infancy. It is still in its childhood, my boy, but what a strong, vigorous, healthy childhood compared with those uncertain days! I was given a position in an advertising agency—a small affair then, and not taken seriously by the majority of the people. But I conceived the idea of educating the public through the public prints; not through the news columns, mind you, but through the despised advertising columns; to turn that activity which then roused only contempt into a vast fund of educational energy; to make it clean; to make advertising a clean, decent, healthy medium for making the world a clean, decent, healthy, better place to live in.

"And now, I ask you, look at the results. Always look at results, my boy. They are the only criterion of every endeavor. Look at the results! Is there a house, a tenement, a factory to-day but uses soap; soap for the bodies of their tenants and their workers; soap for their clothes, soap for their floors? And the whole tenor of their lives is uplifted.

"And now let me ask you one question." Again the muscles tightened and the body coiled. "One question!" The fist came down on the desk. "What soap do they use? Answer me that!"

The eyes held Gail paralyzed.

"They—use—Golden—Soap!"

The sonorous words rang through the room and out through the pillared ways of the Temple, thousand scarlet acolytes bowed and whirled and bowed, censers swung through high misty places, and breathed out their holy breath, the smoke of sacrifices curled upward from the altar and dimmed the gold of the idol.

Gail sat motionless, held by the eyes.

“That is what they use,” the voice went on, softer again; “Golden Soap. And why do they use Golden Soap? Because my efforts have brought it within their means. Because I have made this thing universal. Because I have developed through proper publicity the psychological consumer reaction. And I have done this in two ways, my boy! Two ways. First by dreams. Second by—” a finger shot out at Gail—“by what? By what?”

“By personality,” said Gail mechanically.

“Right! Right! And now to come to the point of your visit. I am something of a judge of men, my boy. You are a dreamer. That much I can see. Now the question is, have you the personality? Have you the swift, gripping, compelling personality?”

He studied Gail a moment, his head a little on one side. Then he moved one hand to his head and smoothed over it a thin gray lock. Gail, unconsciously repeated the motion, and thrust his hand into his own wayward shock of hair.

“I doubt it,” said Mr. Outwater. “And my judgment is reasonably sure. But you will think, no doubt, I am unjust. Thus far you have not told me about yourself. I always give a man a chance to sell himself. If you can sell me on you, I will take back my doubts.”

The moment had come. Gail had known it would come. In many ways in the hours of his intimate preparation for this visit, he had practised this selling of himself. He must be straightforward. He must be upstanding. But in the end the trump card would be in his pocket.

He was not embarrassed. All his usual shyness and the discomfort of the “door-bell feeling” had left him. The speech of Mr. Outwater had inspired him; not by its words, of which he was nearly unconscious, but by the thrilling electricity that surrounded him and flashed from his eyes. He had been held as one is held by an iron bar through which a current of many volts is passing. The tingle of it was still with him.

“I have done publicity work,” he began in a firm voice. “And I have been interested in it. I worked on publicity in the publishing house of Hartwell, Blake and Hartwell for more than a year. I did no selling. I do not want to sell. My line is copy.” The beginning of a blush rose in him.

Mr. Outwater’s face relaxed. He looked away as if he had lost interest. The fingers of his right hand drummed listlessly on the desk. It would not work. The start was wrong. There was nothing for it now but the trump card. Gail gripped himself, and began speaking again just as Mr. Outwater started to speak.

“It was especially interesting to me,” he said, leaning forward, “to hear what you said about dreamers. In my own work at the Hartwells the same idea occurred to me.” He drew the trump card impressively from his pocket. “This, sir, is what I have worked out along that line.”

He got up from his chair and spread the flaring red circular on the mahogany desk. Mr. Outwater’s eyes came back from the window and slowly scanned the paper before him. For a moment the fingers continued their drumming, then stopped. Gail saw them tighten and grow white at the tips as they pressed on the desk. The face grew tense, and the whole body bent forward in sudden concentration. But when, at last, he had finished and looked back at Gail, his face was expressionless, hard, aggressive, and there was no flicker of light in his eyes.

“Not a bad bit of copy for an amateur,” he said. “But of course it’s hopelessly crude for an office like ours. No, I’m afraid we won’t hit it off. And then, too, there isn’t any vacancy. No vacancy. I’ve got all the men I need. Not but what I could get rid of one of them without hurting us. If you had sold yourself I might have considered the exchange.”

Gail got up.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Of course,” Mr. Outwater added, as Gail turned to go, “for the sake of my admiration for your father, I want to help you. If I can, I will let you know. And—just a moment. Write down your address.”

Then he touched something on the under side of his desk. The heavy mahogany door stood open, and the little gray-eyed sentinel was there at attention.

“Tell Mr. Sparks and Mr. Marble there are no vacancies.”

The boy preceded Gail through the enclosure and held the swinging rail open for him. As he passed through, a firm treble voice spoke softly:

“You made it.”

Gail whirled instantly and looked into the white, unmoving face.

“What’s that?”

“Nothing, sir.”

The gun-metal eyes looked into his without a flicker.

VIII

SIXTEEN floors below, in the street's cold freshness, the incense was gone, and with it the mesmeric spell of the high priest and all the exaltation of his chanting. For here, in this more compressed atmosphere, men were playing in tragedies of realism (super parts, mostly), and many of them, too, without regard to the play's uplift motive. The question of whether or not they were, in their small and not very effective gestures, benefiting humanity in the large had little occurrence to them. This person, for instance, bent in the middle and pushing before him a thing on wheels full of hanging gowns, like a bedroom closet which has suddenly lost its walls and its modesty; he, bent and pushing, has forgot humanity, is it not so? And why not, forsooth, for humanity has forgot him! Not all the Golden Soap in heaven and earth can save this one, bent in the middle, from his pushing. And here is one on roller-skates, but without legs—amazing phenomenon!—the roller-skates are fastened to the places where the legs were cut off, and he propels himself with great speed and dexterity by gloved hands on the pavements. Humanity! Bah! Sell you a pencil! Not a very good pencil, but one that pretends to naught. But his pencil will not benefit humanity? No? Not like soap is it? Not like Golden Soap? Let the great god of Bunk give this one back his legs, and behold he will have a worshipper devout beyond all the high priests of the Temple.

Here's one—a little one—overlooked by Golden Soap, indeed; not uplifted, this one; not even clean, this one; black rivers down from his eyes, a knee coming through cloth weary of holding itself together; not a clean knee; no, Golden Soap has passed by this one; because he was so small perhaps. One can sell one's papers and attend to the cold at the same time, for a while, but finally one cannot do both any more, and here the cold has won. One must get close into the corner out of the wind and put one's papers in front for a shield, and then one shivers so that it is hard to talk about the news convincingly. After all, one only has a shirt and trousers, with knees tired of holding together. Come, boy, are you benefiting humanity? Cut it, mister, and buy a paper for the love o' God.

A busy street. There is much under foot passed by by Golden Opportunities. Much that in very truth has little benefited humanity; much, too, and this is interesting, that does not care whether it benefits humanity or

not. Why all this about humanity? Why not say frankly, as these of the street below, that we have persuaded more people to buy this soap than any one else has persuaded to buy another soap; that therefore we are cleverer than any one else, and richer.

Gail, thinking these and similar thoughts, emerged shortly into a district less thought-provoking and far less peopled; notably, that part of the city in which the benefactors of humanity have filed themselves away in their spacious pigeon-holes. So absorbed was he that he passed by the door he should have entered, and had to turn again to find it; it was the door of a new restaurant of old fame. It was a place so dignified that even the display of its famous name over the door would have been a vulgarity. In a little berugged and tapestried hall tea was being served to remotely detached groups on sofas. There was a casual air about the place, as if these groups had wandered to their sofas seeking momentary seclusion and suddenly, to their surprise, tea had been brought to them.

In this place Gail found Muriel. She sat apart from all groups, in a very dark corner, withdrawn as far as possible from the centre of the room, and in appalling dignity, as is usual with women alone in such places. She made a little sign to Gail, and then got up and walked toward him.

There was something very beautiful about her then; something of extraordinary poise; she was so perfectly, so gracefully balanced; there was, too, a mystery about her; even in the simple natural movement of her walking there was mystery, as there is mystery in the walk of some gorgeous animal, as if she were capable of strength, or of some performance of great quickness and litheness and grace, or of passion—but in the instant infinitely restrained. And in her face, upturned now to his, there was mystery, too, as mysterious as the color of her eyes. Or was the mystery in his mind alone? There was nothing mysterious about her words when she was near enough to him to speak with dignity.

"Oh, Gail, oh, boy, oh, Ga-il—what happened?" she said, not pausing at all. "Did you get it? What did he say? How much is he going to pay you? When do you start? We must have tea, don't you think? I'll have an ice, too, I'm nearly starved. My dear, I've been on the go all day. My dear, that lunch—Suzanne's lunch, you know—you've never seen anything like the way they drank cocktails—then shopping all afternoon; oh, boy, boy, I got so many things, mostly unmentionable, but silk—real silk—but I've refused everything for to-night, and mother says you can't even come to dinner. I've got to go to bed right away, so this is the only chance to talk, and you *must* tell me everything. Here's the waiter." In the course of this monologue they had sat down, and one of those superb personages, whose costume and air

proclaim them of that degree of waiters who do no waiting, stood on the outskirts of their conversation.

"Oh," said Gail, leaning forward at him out of the dark.

"We want tea," said Muriel. "And an ice and pastry. Toast for you? Cinnamon toast?"

The waiter withdrew as if mildly shocked at these details, and another lesser, but still great, functionary arrived with a pencil.

When they were left alone again their hands touched, in the dark, by accident, and the old thrill ran through Gail. He wished there could be one of their old understanding silences there in that dark corner, so withdrawn from these other groups and the world beyond. But no. The quick patter of her talk was beginning again.

"Now we must talk," she was saying. "We haven't got much time, and we have a lot to say to each other."

Gail had noticed a subtle change in Muriel since her coming to New York. Her clothes, in the first place, had become complicated. There were things about her neck, fur things; there were veils of curious designs obscuring her eyes and face, giving new contours, and expressions that did not belong; her face, too, was at times otherwise obscured by things put on it, things out of boxes (once he had been almost afraid of her lips); her hair had acquired a curious look of being no longer quite bobbed—an amazing thing, for surely it could not have grown again?

But a subtle change. These are not subtle changes. No, it was more subtle than these. She seemed now to have gained a sort of momentum from the few days here. She gave Gail the feeling of going, more and more rapidly every minute; her whole mind was in the state of one on a sled who has just been pushed off at the top of a hill, and is beginning to feel the pleasant inevitability of his motion.

She had lost the calm, straight, young look that had so delighted Gail in Glenvil; her eyes now seemed moving from side to side in hasty moves, lest something escape them; thought seemed to be all over her brain at once, and expressed in the helter-skelter fashion it arrived at her lips; concentration or direction she had lost, quite.

But more than this. Her mind seemed to be much possessed by things. She took an interest in things to wear, not especially because they were beautiful, or because they were becoming, or because they were blue, but because they were things to wear which were bought at *Jeanne's*, and were like or unlike things worn, or about to be worn, by Helen or Josephine. She took an interest in things to eat; the things that were to eat in the places

where she dined. It would have been nice to have talked sympathetically with her about something to eat; a soft-shell crab or a timbale or an alligator-pear, but one could not; as soon as your thought concentrated on this thing hers was a dozen things away; it had gone, meanwhile, through cocktails, glass, cut glass, china, Ovington's, Lichtenstein's, hats, Sarah Simpson's hat, Sarah's fiancé, and was now hovering on the edges of the banking business, in which Sarah's fiancé was operating. So to talk was difficult.

Really not a very subtle change, all this! Subtle, perhaps, to Gail, because he was reluctant to see it at all; subtly disconcerting to Gail because he had not that elder, detached hilltop point of view which can observe a child about to be married and regard her as such; to him she was Muriel, and it was distressing to him that she was not the same Muriel at successive instants. To him marriage appeared, beforehand, not a vast step; to him, beforehand, it was a casual and natural thing. From the other side he would look at it baffled, as one looks at a miracle; incredulous that he had achieved it; unwilling to accept it as an accomplished thing; but before—no, it was casual and normal enough. He looked so at death or birth. Before, they were happenings, usual enough; but after, they were impossible phenomena. That one had died, or that a new person had entered—absolutely entered, from nowhere—into the world, were things one could not quite believe, or ever conceivably understand.

So Gail, before his marriage, thought, Why all this fuss? Not but what, in moments, the sense of their impending union was overwhelming to his inner being. But the Things of it: preparations, clothes, all the things Muriel fussed over, what had that to do with it? It did not occur to him that, perhaps, all this business made an outer garment wherewith the woman clothes and covers her own overwhelming inner sense. A detached hilltop observer would have given it such significance, and perhaps rightly. Perhaps not. Your hilltop observer, thinking as he must, in general or abstract vein, in the mass as one sees it afar, sometimes has difficulty in isolating the individual. Perhaps in his pleasant tolerance he would have given Muriel, the child about to be married, an undeserved leniency. Perhaps she was, after all, a shallow, flitting thing, with little understanding of such depths as Gail's, little sympathy in his thought, and, indeed, obsessed by Things. But this is for Gail, manlike, logical and slow, to discover.

Now, on the sofa, there was much for them to talk about. Muriel had said so, just at the moment when Gail had thought how pleasant it would be not to talk at all. She must know what had happened—all about it from the beginning—what Mr. Outwater had said.

"He talked about soap," said Gail.

“Oh, Gail!”

“Don’t say ‘Oh, Gail,’ it was very inspiring.”

“I’m afraid you’re making fun of it.”

“Fun? Think of this, dearest!” Gail spread his arms in a magnificent gesture. “Let this picture reveal itself to you. The poor, tired, factory worker, trudging home from his day of toil and sweat, grimy of hand and face, weary of foot; yet there is lightness in his step, joy in his heart. Why? Because he looks forward to the tender caress of his beloved wife, to the happy clustering little ones about his knees? Not at all! Because his heart leaps up at the thought of the delicious meal of salt pork and boiled cabbage that these devoted creatures have prepared for him to comfort the tortured cravings of the inner man? No! Because his aching limbs crave the cool sheets of his bed, that shall fold themselves about him and translate him into a land of fair and restful dreams? No! a thousand times no! Why, then, is there lightness in his step, joy in his heart? Because he knows that in the old cracked soap dish, hard by the dear old family wash-basin, there awaits his touch a cake of soap, of Golden Soap, balm to his calloused hands, salve to his muscle-tired arms, magic to his tense, tortured, suffering face. One touch and he is clean! Clean, my dear! Think of it!”

“Oh, Gail!” said Muriel. “Will you never take anything seriously? What did Mr. Outwater say?”

“Darling, I’m telling you. I’m not exaggerating.”

“No, no, Gail! I mean did he give you the position?”

“I tell you, dearest,” Gail went on, paying no attention to her question, “this soap business is tremendous. I got all worked up.”

“Did he give you the position?”

“And the most remarkable part of it is that it was all a dream. He dreamed it. The soap, I mean.”

“Dreamed it?”

“Absolutely. You, too, can dream! That’s what we need in the advertising—publicity—business—profession—is dreamers. Dreamers and ——”

“But did he give you the position?”

“And men of personality. Now, personality——”

“Gail!”

“What? No, he did not!”

“Ga-il!”

"No. You see, I've got to develop my personality. That's what I'm doing now. Take this soap. Why, soap in my hands would be nothing. Not even Golden Soap. I doubt if I could even work it into a lather. But in the hands of a man of personality——"

She put her hand on his arm. He was wandering so and they had so little time to talk. Time! Yes and so much to say! He had not got the position. Why position? Why not job? Well, job. He was so funny about words. But Mr. Outwater had his address and would let him know soon. And the little boy——

"What about the little boy?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Gail, what did the little boy do?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Gail, tell me *instantly*, what the little boy did."

"He said I made it."

"Made what?"

"The infernal position, of course."

"Gail! Don't call it that."

"I mean the splendid position. I believe I made a hit with the boy. I think he gives my personality credit for being able to whip that soap into quite a foam——"

"He must have known, somehow."

"Bosh!"

"But he must have."

"Fiddles."

"Then why did he say it?"

There was much discussion of why the boy had said it. The discussion did not interest Gail. At last their talk lapsed into a comfortable silence. The things were all eaten and the table pushed off a little, and their napkins thrown over it. Now they smoked silently. It was nice, this silence.

"Gail!" said Muriel suddenly.

"Yes, Most Particular Special!"

"Gail, do you realize how soon we will be married?"

His hand closed over hers.

"Do you realize what a tremendous step it will be for both of us?"

Gail's hand unclosed.

"Why?" he said.

"Why, because! Why, because everything will be so different."

"That's so," said Gail vaguely. "It will be different."

They sat silent for a moment thinking how different everything would be.

"Gail!"

"Yes, Oh Most of All Adored."

"I'm afraid, sometimes."

"Afraid?"

"Because everything will be so different so suddenly."

Gail laughed softly in quick sympathy. Surely this was the old Muriel? He would like to take her in his arms now. This would be the right time to take her in his arms. But, no, here was the waiter.

It was the great, majestic waiter this time, the one who did no waiting. He inquired, as might a friend, if everything had been nice. In reply Gail asked for the check and this magnificent personage, inexpressibly shocked, retired with injury evident in every line of his retreating body.

"But, Gail," Muriel had taken up the talk again. "It is a tremendous step, and I've made up my mind about a number of things. In the first place, I've made up my mind that when two flyaway people like us get married, one of them has got to settle down—and—and—settle down. Now, of course, you think I'm more flyaway than you, because all men think that all girls are more flyaway than they are. But, all the same, I've made up my mind that one of us has got to be practical and domestic, and keep their feet on the ground. And, in the second place, I've made up my mind that person's got to be me. In the third place, you're too temperamental—ever to settle down. And I've made up my mind——"

Why all this making up of minds?

"Why make up your mind?" Gail said.

"Why, because—what?"

"I mean, why not just wait and see what happens?"

"That's a fine way, isn't it? And our house all running at sixes and sevens! How do you suppose houses are run?"

"I don't know. I suppose they just run. Anyway, I like sixes and sevens."

"Well, *I* don't."

And just at this point a curious and novel sensation was infused through Gail. He became aware that in all the thinking he had done about the coming

marriage he had liked certain things, and other things he had not liked, and that the things he liked would be done, and those he did not would not. The presence of an opposing or thwarting will never, during all this thinking, once occurred to him. No one ever said: "Well, *I* don't." During his planning he could say to himself that he liked sixes and sevens in a house, and no regular times for meals, and breakfast alone; he could orate at length on the advantages of a private wedding, and no ushers, and that he didn't care a damn about the presents; and he could emphasize these points by pounding on the table; they were always followed by an impressive silence confirming his will, and no voice dissented. Now here, suddenly, in this public and civilized place, there appeared an opposing force. And Muriel, whom he had thought of as entirely his, had introduced it.

"Oh," he said.

Then he lit a cigarette and thought how selfish! All his life, how utterly selfish and self-centred he had been, thinking only of what he wanted, tramping careless through life over the wills and hearts and loves of others; tramping people underfoot, loving loyal friends, that he might have his way; walking, as it were, with heavy iron heels on people's faces. This painful thought brought tears to his eyes.

"Darling!" he said, seizing Muriel's hand and his voice breaking. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. How selfish and self-centred I have been, thinking only of what I wanted! Of course you don't like—don't like—of course, you don't like it, darling, and we won't have it. We absolutely won't."

What it was she did not like, he had, in the excess of his emotion, forgotten. Then he remembered, and laughed.

She looked up at him, startled.

"I was just thinking of sixes and sevens," he said.

A curious blank grew over Muriel's face. Out of it she looked at him once or twice in the few moments' silence that followed, half curious and half afraid; then she fled away from him on swift wings of thought, and he knew that she had departed to a realm where he could not follow, where no man could follow; to that province of imponderable instinct that is exclusively woman's, where all logic and understanding are laughed to scorn. Nevertheless, though he knew whither she had fled, he said:

"What thinking about, darling?"

And Muriel, as one not quite waking from profound sleep, said:

"Nothing."

But later, musing, she said:

"And, of course, we must think of the children."

The children! The thought had never been spoken between them. Gail suddenly wondered why. Here they were going to be married, had been for months expecting, hoping, thinking of little else but being married, yet this concomitant of marriage—once thought to be an almost indispensable concomitant—had never, in all their talk, been hinted at. It was incredible. Was it because Muriel, brought up in the old school, had supposed the subject taboo? Gail wondered, incidentally, at this point, if the modern girl, the flapper—as she was being heralded in those days—with all her frankness about sex, talked with her fiancé about the children.

The children! Gail himself had thought little about them. But, then, Gail thought little of the future. The picture of a grown-up boy standing before him, and asking his advice, had flashed once or twice into his mind. That was the interesting picture of a child—asking his advice. It was a thing, to be sure, which children, especially grown-up boys, seldom did. His grown-up boy would, of course; and he, looking into the clear eyes, would give it; how splendidly he would give it! And the grown-up boy would, of course, immediately follow it.

But the intermediate stage—babies. Their things lying about the room. Their bottles to be cleaned and sterilized, their clothes to be washed—constantly washed and fussed over—their stomachs to be made right when they were upset, their temperatures to be taken, their weights to be recorded; all the uncounted fussinesses. Some one must do these things, not he. He could be called in to look at the solemn formless little thing in its bath. The vision came before him of the boy—always it was a boy—sitting up in his bath, groping for the soap that floated about in the sudsy water. He had seen them in pictures. It was overwhelming. Before he realized it, he had spoken. After he realized it, he could have bitten out his wanton tongue:

"We must use Golden Soap," he said.

Then he realized it. Muriel came out of her unconsciousness with a little shudder—out of that private realm whither she had withdrawn away from him. She did not speak, but he saw her breast rise and fall, and her head turn away. He felt suddenly helpless, as men sometimes feel, confronted with that appalling feminine expression that was now imminent in her, as if the bottom had fallen out of the ordered cosmos.

"Dearest," he said, seizing her hand in the manner of clumsy men thus confronted; "dearest, I'm sorry. It was my train of thought. I thought of babies and baths, you see, and—and—I should have known you couldn't follow my silly train of thought. Forgive me."

“Oh, don’t, don’t!”

“But, my own Best Beloved——”

“Hush! Oh, hush!”

The waiter was approaching; the lesser waiter with his napkin. He would ask if there was anything more. What an absurdly ironic question! It seemed as if a waiter always intruded so at the most vital crises of life. It seemed as if whenever heaven and earth and hell hung, juxtaposed and threatening, and all the universe stopped its whirling and waited in sinister silence for the next word to be spoken—the word that should balance or shatter all—that some detached voice that was no part of any of it must come between to utter a commonplace but ironic formula.

“Is there anything more?” said the waiter.

“The check,” said Gail, with such violence that the waiter started, and a remote Jewess turned her head to look through her lorgnette.

There was a mechanical performance of the necessary function, a rustling of Muriel’s many and mysterious clothes—a rustling of great dignity—a movement toward the door with eyes on the ground, a surreptitious dabbing of a handkerchief at eyes, a still more surreptitious glance at a passing mirror, other eyes following them with quick understanding, a solicitous doorman, sudden cold and freshness, and the thrill of evening in the street. There were all these things and beneath them the movement of a rapid undercurrent of thought in Gail’s mind.

Yet somehow in the taxicab that whirled them upward through the black, shining avenue, with the festoons of light hanging along its sides; somehow in the sudden, new delight of the lights and the color and the cold, sharp-smelling, tingling air; somehow, carried away in the ecstasy of it, Gail imparted to Muriel something of this quick, primitive thrill, and lifted her up out of the pettiness of thought; somehow, in some old, old way that was known of men an eternity before all the complexities of this civilization that had wrought upon the earth these dancing lights and colors, love was restored to them there in the mystery of the marching night.

And when she left him to be handed out by another solicitous doorman into the set of pigeon-holes in which, for the moment, she lived, there was a touch of hands and half a kiss that sent happiness tingling through them again.

Somehow these things had happened, for love between two who have once loved is a persistent thing, not to be lightly waved aside by trifling thoughts.

Yet in the long walk through the park to the west-side hotel where Gail had lodged himself, his thoughts were not trifling.

"Little things," he began in his musing way. "But so many of them—such a multitude of little things. A straw and then another straw; a wisp of straws, a bundle of straws, a bale of straws. A thing is funny or it is not funny. Now that is a trifling distinction. Is there an absolute standard for these things? No. Therefore it is a trifling distinction. But you, Gail, you think this is funny. Soap, for example. There is nothing essentially funny about soap. It's just soap. But soap may be funny. Some little thought of soap comes flashing into your mind, and you say it, you say it—that's the worst of it, Gail, your damnable tongue—you say it because at the moment it delights you. You think it is funny. Why, damn it, Gail, it's the most fundamental distinction in the world! Funny or not funny. Why, the whole scheme of things could be shattered by such a distinction.

"That star, there—Venus, the evening star—does she laugh sometimes about some cosmic absurdity, and the moon, sedate creature, flame in anger at her irreverence? And then does not the whole solar plan collapse? No, there is nothing funny about the universe. It is a serious, solemn business.

"So, perhaps, is life. So, perhaps, is love. A serious, solemn—a tragic business."

His thought silenced under the dull oppression of its tragedy. He walked up and down the curving paths toward the sinking Venus. His feet made dull, regular sounds—heavy sounds.

"This soap business," he said at last aloud, "is likely to come between us. Can anything come between us? Can anything come between Muriel and me? Muriel! Can anything come between us? Can anything come between us?"

He said it over and over in time with the heavy sounds of his feet. He was saying it without emotion now, as if it were a formula not expected to be answered.

Even the lights of the city when he emerged from the gloom of the park did not exalt him out of the cold depths of his sodden thought.

IX

DAYS were passing quickly now, sped on by a succession of events. A new life opened, and newness was exciting in the moment. A letter came from the Outwater "Advisers," a dignified letter on paper exquisitely engraved in red and green.

Dear Winbourne [it ran, between wide margins], a vacancy has unexpectedly appeared. I am going to give you a chance to show what you can develop in the personality line.

You will start on copy, which is, I understand, your wish. You will understand that the position is tentative. If you develop, as I hope you will, the sky is the limit. If you do not—perhaps you will by then have decided that publicity is not your game.

I have investigated your character and your situation in life. You will be pleased to know that in the first of these fields I can find nothing to complain of.

I mean to be frank with you. As to your future, I understand that you are contemplating marriage. I should be the last to discourage a young man from so normal and worthy a project. I am a strong believer in marriage. I believe it has that settling effect so essential to a man's best and most serious work.

If I had my way I should employ only married men.

For this reason—mark you, I speak frankly—I should suggest that you marry before beginning work with me. I have therefore set the 1st of January as the date of your entrance into my office, believing that this will give you ample time for the arrangements which I have noted.

In the matter of salary you will understand that the more than usually liberal offer I am making you takes into consideration the above-mentioned project.

You will start with me at a salary of thirty-five hundred dollars ($3,500) per annum.

The situation in my office demands a prompt decision on your part, and I shall be pleased to hear from you at your early convenience.

Cordially,

B. Minturn Outwater.

The letter was exciting to Gail. Its reference to his marriage overcame what feeling he might otherwise have had of its dominating quality or of the slight inconsistency of its offer of a "tentative" position. Many a young man, unexpectedly brought face to face with marriage to one he has long loved, ignores half-hidden flies in so lambent an ointment.

He typed a careful acceptance, and then precipitated the little Gay family into a flurry of excitement. The wedding was instantly discussed in all its little details.

"We *must* make a real effort," said Mrs. Gay, groping, frenzied, for her pince-nez.

"It needn't be such an effort," said Gail.

"But, my boy—the church, the invitations—we have no time—men never think of such things, of course. I've never been so hurried in my life. We must make a tremendous effort. I don't care what it costs, Muriel darling, it's the one great event in all our lives. We must show our friends what it means to us. We must make an effort—a great sacrifice, if need be. Darling, it must be in St. Stephen's Church, where your father was married to your mother. Of course, it is a new church, and so much larger and more splendid. How I should have loved a big wedding in that beautiful church! But it was not for me. A second marriage, you know. Ah!" She dabbed a moment with her handkerchief, and the pince-nez, exhausted by their long effort to cling to her nose through this excited speech, fell gratefully over her bosom.

"But, Mrs. Gay," said Gail, "Muriel and I had decided on a very small wedding."

She looked at him angrily scornful.

"You and Muriel! You and Muriel! That's always the way. Has it never occurred to you that *I* have some interest in this ceremony? No! Of course not! In this whole affair I have never been accorded one instant's consideration. I was not even consulted until it had been entirely arranged and every one was talking about it. Perhaps you don't think I suffered during all that time in Glenvil, when every one I met smiled and smirked at me, and made insinuating remarks about you and my daughter, and not a word did you say! You, Gail, you were hardly civil to me! You hardly spoke to me!

And now! Now! You and Muriel have decided! Oh, it is too much! It *is* too much!"

She pressed the handkerchief into her sobbing eyes with her little fat fingers, and Gail sat silent and appalled. Muriel came behind her chair and put her arms round her neck, and her hands under her chin, and turned her face up and kissed it tenderly over each eye.

"Dearest, dearest," she said, and Gail, whose heart had leaped up so often at the word, felt a space extend itself between them. "Gail did not mean it. He only meant we had *thought* of having a small wedding, but nothing, of course, has been decided about it. How could we decide without you, dearest one?"

How could they, indeed?

So calm came again to Mrs. Gay, and the hurried cheerfulness came back into the little drawing-room where they sat. There was much telephoning and many plans were drawn up on scattered sheets of paper. Under the efficient directing hand of Mrs. Gay, restored now to her full faculties, arrangements were made thick and fast.

To Gail the days that followed made a confused dream. Names started out at him from the Social Register, old names half forgotten, of friends long drifted, of friends of his father's; darted out of corners of his memory and were neatly typed by him in an interminable list; presents were taken in and unpacked till the rooms became a riot of excelsior and shining silver; spoons and forks of useless, endless shapes and sizes ranged themselves in armies on the tables; delicate and many-hued glass in oppressive abundance tingled out of tissue-paper; great, cumbersome vases unrolled themselves on the floor. Telephones and door-bells rang incessantly; letters were dashed off with creaking pens; exuberant girls burst into the room and entwined themselves with Muriel; Mrs. Gay stood, a vast, impressive central figure, revolving slowly like a dervish beginning its dance, and pointing her fat finger as she turned; boxes and boxes of costumes, hats, and mysterious silk things were opened, and their contents indiscriminately scattered over the furniture; dignified gentlemen in black were consulted and argued with about oysters, salads, and cakes, and subterranean individuals were interviewed without reference to national constitutions or state laws.

To Gail it was all vaguely chaotic and a little disheartening. The rare intervals in which he saw Muriel alone were punctuated with interruptions. Such moments as could be devoted to the old demonstrations of love were hurried and overhung by the fear of intrusion from without. He saw her always through a haze of things, through masses of details, a little estranged,

always a little separated from him in that new life where she seemed to have entered and which was so utterly not his.

Once, late at night, after a hurried, tumbling day, he had held her an instant in his arms and she had burst out crying there.

"I can't go through with it, Gail," she said. "I can't, I can't! What does it all mean? It's too much. What is marriage? I am not sure—I don't know. Gail, after all this—I can't—how can I go through with that? Oh, Gail, Gail, I wonder if I love you—I mean—love you enough; we're very different, Gail, you and I. Oh, Gail, say something."

Thus, in overstrung moments, do we fail to express the inexpressible.

"You're tired, darling," said Gail. Old, comforting words.

They sat silent a little interval trying to resolve the sense of their union into some tangible thing. If it were a ponderable, rational thing, like that set of glasses there, he could explain it to her. But it was not. He wondered how people could understand, people who had been so absorbed in facts and in things. At last he said:

"Love, I think, is mysterious. If we could talk about it as we can talk about things—about these things in this room, about these little details of our wedding—perhaps it would lose its lure. I think it is mysterious, like the silent, ordered moving of planets. We will accept it easily, as we accept these things, and live it. It is the only way. It must not fret us as the toys of life fret us. It is a thing apart, a little of the nature of infinity, something we do not understand, and must not want to understand. . . ."

The door burst open on them without warning, and Mrs. Gay's figure bulked in its opening.

"Muriel, my dear, you must come now and let Gail go. Bed is the place for tired little girls."

Muriel did not look quite at him as she said good night.

X

THE subject of marriage is one so interesting that many volumes, large, erudite, detailed, violent, and piquant have been written of it, and mystified persons have read them through the ages. Presumably their interest is the perennially absorbing one of the sex relations; love within and without the bond; but we of the hilltop suspect that the interest of marriage to the parties thereto is, or eventually becomes, primarily other than this. We suspect that the important interest of marriage lies in the amazing problem of two persons, different or alike, persisting throughout a lifetime in each other's company. To the spectacle of this persistence, when we observe it, we bow, humbly and solemnly, as awed before a miracle. To us marriage is more astonishing, thus regarded, than in any of its facets of grand passion, which, we take it, are but reflections of a scheme in nature. For this extraordinary singleness of devotion, this cleaving to one till death us do part, is an affair essentially human—perversely so, perhaps, though they tell us of scattered precedents among the birds—and of that order of human performance a little suggestive of eternity; of that order of human performance which, appalled at the wonder of it, we call divine.

God knows, if divinity may truly infect so earthy beings, such a love and such a cleaving must partake of its nature. And, if it be so, it is a solemn thing; and if it be so, it should be entered upon in solemn mien, level-eyed, and with single and not dissipated thought.

And right it is that the place for so solemn a thing be a church; that we stand, as we believe ourselves to do, in a nearness to God, and in the atmosphere of His mysteries, of which this one is, perhaps, not the least.

So Gail, entering into wedlock with Muriel, thought himself thus to stand in the solemn edifice dedicated to St. Stephen, and in expectation of his so standing the church was solemnly prepared. It was prepared with palms reaching up into the dark places over the altar, with golden chrysanthemums clustering about the altar's foot, with true-lovers' knots of broad white ribbon gathered at the pews, with an organist to play the most beautiful and most solemn music, with one boy, the most perfect boy soloist in all the world, to sing a most solemn and beautiful solo, with one bishop and one of the lesser clergy to perform the beautiful and solemn service.

And at quarter after three on the bright, cold December Wednesday (for Wednesday is the best day of all) on which Gail's wedlock was to be secured, a group of solemn and black-clothed men gathered at the end of the long, empty church, and spoke solemnly together.

Yet if one approached more closely, their black garb might appear less solemn, for on their hands and legs gray relieved the black, and the jaunty fit of their coats, while beautiful, was far from solemn, and the great bursting chrysanthemums which bloomed forth from their lapels were almost gay. Their half-whispered talk, as one came near to hear it, was really not solemn either, nor did it seem peculiarly relevant to the dignity of the occasion.

"Why the devil did they get us here three-quarters of an hour before the show?"

"To learn the batting order."

"Odd on the left, even on the right; bride left, groom right."

"Wonder if it's a dry wedding?"

"Dry wedding! Jever hear of a dry one at the Gotham Club? By the way, Bill, was that real? Wherjegetit? I feel it in my knees. This marriage business is barbaric. Dry wedding, huh!"

"So Gail's a live wire in the advertising game."

"God help him."

"It's that girl."

"Gail can do better than that. Do you remember that *Hour Glass* story?"

"Old Anarch log-rolling."

"What? Log-rolling! It's the best thing I'll get in many a long day; the boy's got the spark."

"It'll flicker out now."

"He's young. Youth can stand anything."

"God help him, I say. Bless his old heart! You can roll all the logs you want for him. Hope he'll come out on this. Barbaric business, marriage. Funny about my knees. All right everywhere else. Dry wedding, huh!"

Thus five of the Anarchs, preparing for their solemn duty of escorting their friend out of bachelordom. A little apart from them, conscientiously studying his list and smiling, at intervals, to himself, was one with flaming hair that would not conform. He was Michael Donohue, Gail's Irish roommate at college. He seemed vastly younger than the Anarchs, less comfortable in his clothes, yet going through little private bursts of amusement at something in his own thought.

And now, oh, solemn organ! First a subterranean rumble, unmeasured depths below all the substructure of the church where the motor that moved the bellows was beginning. Then, a high, piping note, two notes, a discord; a rush of sound running up and down the scale and seeming to wake far, forgotten pipes in every remote corner of the vast church. Snatches of vagrant melody; a thin flute motif of Wagner's; a bit of the devil music from the "Pilgrim's Chorus," then long-drawn sentimental Puccini chords and experiments on the whole-tone scale. But by the time the first forerunner of the congregation had come, the organ had settled into the solemnity of Handel's Largo.

A curious figure this forerunner of the congregation. A little wizened woman, with wisps of gray hair awry from her diminutive head, yet the lilies of the field, nay, Solomon and all who toil not, nor spin, were never so arrayed. A hat hung with purple plums, green grapes, and scarlet cherries, and of a shape long forgot by the turning seasons of fashion, balanced itself precariously; a dress all of velvet, and spangled at the hem with glistening jet, managed to hang upon her body; and below all, shoes, once tan and of a size beyond all concealment. Doubtless, in all the annals of this church, no such incongruous figure had ever trod the conformist sanctity of its vestibule.

Coming in the central door she stood, an instant, utterly dazed, then made a panicky little rush for one of the side doors. Before she had reached it, however, an alert usher, his magnificent coat tails flying behind him, had hastened to intercept her.

"Your name, please?" he said, producing his crumpled list.

"Oh, no name at all; no name at all, sure."

"Well, er—I'm sorry, madam, but you see—er—the names——"

"Oh, I'll not trouble you at all, sir; not at all; I'll just duck in annywhere at all, sir, where I'll be out of sight; I will."

"But, er, I'm sorry, madam."

"Then is it I can't see me baby married at all, is it? Afther all these years, thin, an' me wrappin' her oop aginst the cold, an' protectin' of her, an' feedin' her ginger when she'd have the colic, an' all, an' all——"

Her voice had attained a shrillness altogether incompatible with the legends of silence flanking the walls. A threat of tears, also, preceded by a groping for a handkerchief in an enormous bead bag, had brought several of the ushers, notably Michael Donohue, who spoke now for the first time:

"Oh, you must be Miss Gay's nurse," he said with great seriousness.

"That's just what I say."

"Why, you can sit anywhere on this side of the church."

A smile of gratitude that the cherubim in their most exalted thanksgiving would have envied lit up her wrinkled face.

"That's just what I say!" she said. "Annywhere at all."

Michael Donohue made a magnificent gesture. "Come with me."

"That's just what I say. It's a fine lad ye are, too, with your grand red hair like me own bye; dead he is, goin' on twinty year now."

He had offered her his arm, which, however, she had not dared to touch, and they were walking, side by side, Michael with his elbow still extended toward her.

"An' no howly wather touchin' me," she went on. "Faith I was niver in wan of these Protestant churches in me life, God have mercy on me soul."

"I'm a Catholic, too," he said, as he showed her to the front pew on the side. "Now you'll be right next the family."

"That's just what I say," she said, "annywhere at all."

He left her fumbling at her bead bag, and retreated hurriedly. Gail would like that, he thought. Of all the great congregation that would see this wedding, no guest could be more pleasing to Gail than this devoted creature. Michael had been stirred by her somewhere in his Irish soul.

By the time he got back others had appeared. Women very gorgeously and complicatedly arrayed; men remembering to take off their tall hats as they entered the aisle, exquisitely bedecked and uncomfortable children trailing behind their elders with awe in their faces. Below the chatter as they advanced up the aisles came the slow comforting notes of the organ proceeding through a series of familiar classics. When the church was nearly filled the lone choir-boy stepped forward, waited beyond the time when the organ had prompted his beginning for the din of talk to subside, then, seeing that it would not, began tremulously with a troubled look in his face.

Meantime Gail and his best man, Overby of the Anarchs (picked, after some discussion, by Mrs. Gay overruling Gail's own desire for Michael), gathered behind the door from which, at the proper moment, they should make their entrance.

Gail was thinking, over and over: "More than anything in the world, more than anything in the world." Then he caught himself suddenly, and muttered aloud: "How absurd!"

"What?" said Overby.

"Oh, I was thinking." He must say nothing to this cynical person. There was already the beginning of a downward smile on Overby's lips. Damn it,

why must he go through with this thing? All these infernal people. To confess his love before them. To say to all these people: "I love this woman and shall cleave to her." Was it more binding that so many should hear him? He wished the organ would stop. That intolerable spring song. He whistled it at a time considerably in advance of the organ's solemn measure.

"I'm glad that's over," he said, when it was over, because he felt the need of saying something. But then, suddenly, he wished Overby were absent.

Out in the church a voice wandered lonely among the arches, with so wistful, so tragic, so lost a wandering that it seemed an angel had been entrapped there, and sought, helplessly, a way out of an unfamiliar place. All there is in the world of unfulfilled hope, of that new-found sense that nothing can ever be the same, of little things immeasurably, crushingly big, of groping in the dark, of things that cannot be understood; these were in the vague, wandering melody that came to Gail through the closed door, where he would enter into his new life. On the rise and fall of it he was carried, helpless; all solid things faded out of his sight, there was no world, no time, no thought, no memory, no space. To him, afterward, the duration of that singing seemed a flashing instant; again it was a divisionless eternity; of the melody itself no two notes ever recurred to him—yet at curiously incongruous moments of his life the sense of it came back in a quick wave of emotion, that was neither exalted nor unbearable pain, yet both; the beginning and the end, everything and nothing, indivisibly one.

But out in the church of St. Stephen, as an accompaniment to the singing of the boy, the talk went on. One hardly knew the Gays, to be sure, but one could not resist a wedding at St. Stephen's. And then the reception; one could hardly miss this, and then turn up there. Who was this Winbourne? Oh, literary. What had he written? Some story or other. Connected with some publisher? Money of his own, of course! No? What would they do, poor children? Of course she had money. Who was Mrs. Gay before? Oh, twice! Divorced? Really? Not divorced! Older generation. Nowadays, of course . . . young marriages the worst . . . each other's husbands and wives . . . dance the other night . . . road-houses . . . automobiles . . . Look, look! Bobbed hair—flapper—shorter every day—necklace belonged to the Empress of Russia . . .

There!

A hush came on the congregation. Mrs. Gay walked up the aisle on the arm of an usher. Her dignity was appalling. The pince-nez had been utterly abandoned—did not even hang; her head, with its wide lavender hat, was thrown back, and her eyes, unseeing as they must have been, were directed,

unswervingly, to the altar. It would have been difficult to imagine a more impressive figure, even if one had been in the offing, as Gail had, during her weeks of preparation. Simultaneously with her majestic sitting down in the front pew, the boy, whom no one but Gail had heard, ceased singing, so that when the excited conversation which for the solemn interval of Mrs. Gay's march had hushed in awe, began anew with enhanced excitement, there was no conflicting sound.

Mrs. Gay's establishment alone in her pew which she adequately occupied was the signal for two ushers to march to the two front pews, about face and march back, unrolling, as they went, yards of wide satin ribbon to the middle of the church, where with some difficulty they fastened the ends, imprisoning the distinguished occupants of the first half hundred pews, and dividing, as it were, the goats from the sheep.

At this point the expectant frenzy was almost beyond control. The guests in this house of God had, almost without exception, turned their heads in the opposite direction from His altar, finding the spectacle about to be enacted in this quarter far more engrossing, and were craning their necks and trying to see over or between the heads of those intervening; some half out of their pews and straining against the ribbon for the first sight of it. A Buddhist, observing the congregation at this instant, would doubtless have supposed the sanctuary of this, our Christian Temple, to be in the vestibule. He would also have believed, perhaps, that we Christian worshippers uttered our prayers to each other rather than to a divine Presence, and uttered them, too, in a pleasantly conversational tone, with much laughter and nodding of heads; that the more sound produced in this promiscuous performance the more satisfactory it was expected by us Christians to be to our Deity; had he been near enough to hear and understand our prayerful utterances, he would have discovered them to be but vaguely concerned, if at all, with our immortal souls; but with a vast variety of material things, from champagne to grandmother's laces, from dowries to divorce, from orange-blossoms to jade earrings.

But now the moment had come. Behold the doors thrown open, and two solemn ushers framed in the doorway. Remote, restless flashes of color behind them. Frantic craning of necks. The sudden, unmistakable tinkling of an electric bell in the far reaches of the chancel. A dozen people rising from their seats. Gail, making his entrance, unnoticed, through the palms. Then all the chatter was drowned in the first booming notes of the old, old march.

Gail, standing at the foot of the steps, was unimpressed by the vast assembly, no one of whom, thus far, had remarked his presence. Behind him stood the officiating clergyman, equally unimpressed (as clergymen must

come, in time, to be) by the backs of the hundreds of heads which craned toward the procession. Behind him, in the shadow, stood the bishop, a heroic figure, in whose steady eyes no single image of all the thrilling scene before him was reflected. In the great throng perhaps he was alone in the consciousness of the Presence before which, in every thinking hour of his day, his heart was humbled.

How long it took, Gail thought! What an interminable procession of dummy persons that moved like wooden figures with incredible slowness! Yet in time they all arrived, parted, stood in their set places, and suddenly then the vision of Muriel absorbed the whole of his consciousness.

All the lightness was in this moment gone from her. Her face was of the pallor of ivory; quite absent was the color she could so skilfully have applied to mask the emotion that had so paled it. It was almost pitiful, he thought, her concession to him in the great moment before the critical eyes of her world. He loved her more, perhaps, in that time of waiting than in all the time before; loved her for her pallor, for the quiet grace that had come with the subtle passing of her girl phase in her march up the long aisle.

"Dearly beloved," the old words filled the church with echoing sound, "we are gathered together in the sight of God and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony . . ."

How adequate these words; how direct; how simple, with not one superfluous thought; with no circumlocution; "to join together!"

". . . but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. . . ."

What perfect progress of sound, of thought, each sentence rising to its supreme climax with language so controlled; each word fulfilling its single purpose, nor less, nor more!

And now was passed the awful moment of hush, when in the most correct of assemblages passes the wave of fear lest one choose to speak rather than through eternity to hold his peace; and now they are required and charged; they will, they will; and who giveth this woman?

Contrary to much custom, Muriel had been escorted by her father's brother, the magnificent General Gay, straight, austere, the perfect product of the old army, to whose gorgeous bearing and wide reputation Mrs. Gay had reluctantly bowed; not without tears; not without much reiteration that "it was not the place of a stepmother"; not, also, without careful consideration of the impression which should be made upon this grand gathering by this grand old man, a veteran, a brilliant financier, and a possessor of wealth whose bounds were said by persons given to such

hyperbole to be infinite. A sacrifice, a noble subordination of self—but were such deeds without reward? That shall be as it shall be; the grand old man is well preserved, and hath a span of life before him yet. But we must not interrupt the solemn progress of the union of Gail and Muriel by such speculation.

The vows were made; to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer—how significant this "for richer"!—the troth given.

The congregation, relieved, raised their heads from the strained position of their reverence. Over now, all but the final benediction; over now, this solemn thing when heads must be bowed and vows made, and God feared, and talk stilled, and nervous movement checked, and impatient bodies held in hard restraint. Now only gaiety ahead; to laugh your loudest, release the full flood of your chatter, relax your face so twisted in the torture of silence and heavy thought!

Yet when the bishop moved forward out of the shadow and raised his hand for the final benediction, and his old voice came as if from some realm utterly apart, the heads bent unconstrained as if motivated by something without themselves, and in the little duration of his words there was, in the church of St. Stephen, an interval of shame, when hearts were humbled before a Presence that passeth understanding.

But with the bursting out of the opening crescendo of the triumphal march, the awe departed, laughter and gaiety broke out anew, and Gail and Muriel faced a sea of smiling faces. Strangely, Gail was unconscious of them. He was unconscious of everything in that retreat from the altar but of the vague smile of his face, the light touch of a hand on his arm, the faint near fragrance of an exotic flower, and the words of the benediction that repeated themselves over and over in a chanting undercurrent below the wedding march: "That ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen."

And in the spacious car which drove them through the growing dusk of the street, when new lights pricked out in hanging rows flanking their swift progress, there, too, was Gail, not come back from under the spell, so that Muriel, speaking to him, heard no response, and laid her hand on his arm to draw him forth from his absorption.

"Was I very pale?" she said.

XI

On the second day of January in that famous year of reconstruction, 1921, in which, it will be remembered, all the grievous problems of this great nation were suddenly solved by the simple expedient of switching Presidents, Gail began his work in the publicity office of B. Minturn Outwater, Adviser. It was the day after his twenty-sixth birthday, which day marked, also, the close of his honeymoon, and it is not to be wondered at that he made his way to his new office with a heavy step. Once there, however, the tingle of this adventure seized him, and he waited eagerly in the enclosure without the shrine that was consecrated to the Adviser himself.

He waited half an hour—an hour—an hour and a quarter, during which his avidity somewhat cooled. During which, also, he had to endure the sly grimaces of the steely-eyed boy, who seemed to find many an errand by which he passed before Gail's eyes. Promptly at the end of this period, however, the door into the outside world flung open, and Gail knew before he saw him that the Adviser himself was there. All the heads at the desks in the vista bent lower over their work; the steely boy straightened; the air tightened; minds and bodies galvanized, almost with a click. Mr. Outwater, with a small portion of his all-embracing glance, saw Gail, held up a finger, extended it horizontally toward the door of his office, and did not pause in his march. Within the mahogany seclusion, however, his manner became more genial.

"Glad to see you, my boy," he said. "Wedding trip did you good." A slight twinkle indicated that no matter what the rush of his work, no matter what the complexity of the great business that pressed in and down upon him, this great man was conscious of infinitesimal details.

"Yes, I—" began Gail.

"Yes, yes, wedding trips are fine things. Yes, my boy, I well remember mine—ah, how well!"

Astonishing, such a memory!

"Ready for work, I suppose?"

"Yes, I——"

"Hard, grinding work, my boy, but subtle—fascinating. Holding in your hands the fate of great industries!" His hands rounded themselves about an

industry, and the spell descended on Gail.

"Think of it, my boy. Vast industries all over the land, moving, making, producing; wheels turning, fires blazing, thousands of men, human cogs, making their little motions hour by hour, day by day; vast machines turning out, turning out—for what? For what, my boy? To keep you and me and the rest of the great mass of humanity alive! To bring us the needs, the tools, the material of our lives, the little luxuries that lubricate our lives, the means to the fulfilment of our lives. And you and I? What are we? We are the subtle, silent voice that extends out to the far corners of this world to tell humanity that these things are at hand, waiting for them, flowing out of these mills and workshops and factories. And more than that, my boy; we are the voice of truth! We are the voice that directs those innocent human desires, that points them to the best of everything, that keeps these millions of struggling creatures from falling into the hands of swindlers, of the producers of low-grade, hurtful products, of money-grubbers, of unscrupulous pirates. And we are the subtle influence that makes possible the continuance of the honest, decent industries, that protects them against lying, thieving competitors. My boy, you are working in a noble cause. I congratulate you."

Gail grasped the long hand that extended toward him, and the strong grip of it sent a tingle down to the soles of his feet. He found his eyes looking straight into the gray ones opposite him, and, as before, the world faded out. You and I. This person and Gail.

Then Mr. Outwater turned and looked a long time out at the foggy city, and seemed to forget Gail utterly in his contemplation. And Gail stood thinking. Perhaps, after all, this was true. Perhaps there was a real service here to people; to the powers of production. At all events, there was nothing to be ashamed of. The thing was clean. And perhaps it was true.

With a quick movement Mr. Outwater had turned. His finger shot out at Gail. His extended arm remained an instant motionless, then dropped, and all his body relaxed.

"Come," he said, turning his back.

At the first desk in the preliminary vista a person of middle age, of the standardized appearance that is known as well groomed, sprang to his feet with the kind of smile one assumes before being photographed. He was a perfect replica of the man who smokes a famous cigarette.

"The name?" he said, when Mr. Outwater had introduced them and Gail had cringed under his steel-trap handshake.

Gail repeated his name.

"Son of the artist," said Mr. Outwater.

He remembered, of course, the artist.

"I never forget a name," he added, "once I have got it correctly. And my name is Blough—B-l-o-u-g-h."

"Not Bluff," said Mr. Outwater, with a twinkle. Mr. Blough returned the twinkle in appreciation of Mr. Outwater's ready wit. "You won't get a chance to forget his name, Winbourne," the chief went on. "He's my right-hand man. Personality sticks out all over him. Eh, Blough?" They laughed heartily at this. Gail, too, laughed with proper moderation. "Now, Blough, Winbourne is our new copy man. Young blood, understand, personality in embryo, so to speak. Do the honors, will you? I've got a client waiting." He whispered a magic name in Mr. Blough's ear, and Mr. Blough's eyes stood out. Instantly, however, he had resumed his genial smile.

The chief departed, and Mr. Blough, with Gail slightly behind him, began his tour.

"These," he said, sweeping his hand over the vista, "are the representatives. They are the contacts between the agency and the advertiser. Personal contacts, you understand; a fundamental, I might almost say a dominating, element in any agency organization. Personal contact. Jenks, shake hands with Winbourne, our new copy man."

"The name?" said Jenks.

"Winbourne," said Gail.

"Son of the illustrator."

"Ah, of course. Winbourne, the illustrator. Did that hosiery series, didn't he?"

"No," said Gail. "A landscape-painter."

"Oh! H'm. Landscapes. Big turnover in landscapes, they say. Of course. Winton I was thinking of. I rarely forget a name, once I know it. Well, Winbourne, I congratulate you. Sorry you're not in the representatives. Great thing, personal contacts, you understand. Blough and I have put many a young concern on the map. Basic merchandising policy, I tell them; that's the secret of success. Most people have no conception of the work an agency does in actual marketing of products. Take the 'Protecto' dress-shield people, now; I laid out their whole sales campaign. 'Basic merchandising policy,' I said to Mr. Steinberg, 'is what you need in your organization.' He came back in a week and said: 'Jenks, I believe you're right.' I gave it him, too, believe me! He's got a sales system now, runs like a clock.

"Well, Winbourne, I congratulate you. You're in a big, live, growing concern. An inspiring profession. I tell you, it's a force in the world that

can't be overestimated. An irresistible force for good, for truth, for righteousness. I congratulate you."

They proceeded into the art department, a large, bright room, its panelled walls hung with brilliant color. Gail was overwhelmed by the variety of its pictures. There were girls, cross-legged, displaying legs of phenomenal length, and gorgeously hosed; there were girls who had bathed, girls who had shampooed, girls who had applied various substances, girls whom men had loved and indeed married because they had nice teeth; girls who had retained their complexions in the world's wear and tear; girls who had gargled, girls who had eaten mints; sweet young girls graphically portrayed in all the details of their once mysterious toilet. A brilliant galaxy to one whose love was yet young.

Forming a frieze atop this pleasing gallery a legend, carved in the wood and intertwined with curving flower designs, announced that THERE IS NO ART BUT IT BE CONSECRATE TO LIFE AND THE DAILY NEEDS OF MANKIND. At the far end of the room hung a bronze portraying the head and bust of B. Minturn Outwater, and beneath it this tribute:

PRESENTED ON HIS FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF
HIS EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO THE
HUMAN RACE IN THE PROMOTION OF
WHOLESOME LIVING, CLEAN THINKING,
AND DEVOTION TO THE TRUTH
THE GOLDEN PRODUCTS CORPORATION

"*NEITHER DO MEN LIGHT A CANDLE AND PUT IT UNDER A BUSHEL, BUT ON A CANDLESTICK, WHERE IT GIVETH LIGHT TO ALL THAT ARE IN THE HOUSE.*"

Gail thought he had never seen so busy a room as this, where art was produced with such facile touch. Men clung to stools over drafting-tables; crouched over desks, cut up paper with long shears, and scattered the cuttings over the floor (in which it was ankle-deep), and talked in low, rapid words over telephones. Boys moved everywhere, carrying large sheets of paper, emblazoned pieces of cardboard, and proofs in long rolls. Gail and Mr. Blough waited a moment at the desk of the department's head while this hurried and dishevelled person argued with a despairing artist.

"You've got to get that modern touch," he was saying. "Vague, indefinite stuff; blobs of paint; stuff that you don't know whether you're coming or going. Get me? That's the line they fall for. Blobs! Out-of-focus stuff? Get

me? Oh, beg pardon, Mr. Blough." He got up suddenly. "Meet Mr. Stippleworth, Mr. Blough. And Mr.——?"

"Winbourne," said Gail. "I know Stippleworth."

It was Stippleworth of the Anarchs.

"Oh, God," said Stippleworth. "You, too!"

They shook hands, and Gail was relieved to shake hands with some one who did not regard his hand as a strength-testing machine. But they said little more, embarrassed by their mutual presence in this place.

Gail and his guide inspected the traffic department, where every piece of work was "followed through" from the inception of the idea to the final insertion in the medium. They inspected the mechanical department, where the mechanics of type and engraving were conducted; the media and checking department, where magazines and newspapers were studied and advertisements were checked where they were inserted; the statistical and research department, and attached to it the experimental laboratory, full of test-tubes and retorts; a person having his skin observed through a microscope; pictures on the walls of magnified skins, the bones of the feet, the roots of the hair, the teeth, and views of the nervous and vascular systems. In all of these there was violent, almost paralyzing hand-shaking and the repetition of names. Gail felt his personality ebbing.

They moved at last into "Copy," the "Holy of Holies," as Mr. Blough called it.

"And here's where you stay, God help you," he said cheeringly. "Queer birds, these copy boys. Sort of writing chaps, I guess; probably temperamental. Never know what to make of these birds. They think different from the rest of us, somehow. Hard to get any personality into them. Most of 'em'll stick right at this stuff till they die. Never get beyond a certain point. Exceptions, of course. Take Jenks. He started on copy. Couldn't keep him down."

Gail felt relief on entering the copy-room. It was no less busy, perhaps, but there was an air about it of easy dishabille, of disorder, that was more pleasing than the methodical offices he had been through. Every one was smoking a pipe. Every one was in shirt-sleeves. There was less slickness of hair.

The head of the department was a small, wiry, nervous man, whose eyes looked out through thick glasses. He spoke in little gusts, in an abbreviated and telegraphic manner, and kept saying, "What? Yes!" at intervals.

"Get accustomed to Mr. Swift, Winbourne," said Mr. Blough. "He's your chief. He's the busiest, hardest-working, slave-driver of a copy head in New

York City, eh, Swift? He'll make you sweat."

"Winbourne? Winbourne? Where have I heard that name? What? Yes!"

"Son of the sculptor."

"Experience in copy? What? Yes!"

"I—er," began Gail.

"Not much, I guess," said Mr. Blough. "What was your line, Winbourne?"

"Why, I wrote—er, that is, I wrote bl—copy for a publishing—er—concern."

"Oh! Man to take Wade's place, what? Yes!" He pointed to a desk. "Wade's desk. Your desk." He looked through his glasses at Mr. Blough. "Too bad about Willie, what? Yes!"

"No personality," said Mr. Blough.

"H'm," said Swift.

When Mr. Blough had gone and Gail was left alone with his new desk, Swift went to a book-shelf and, taking down an enormous scrap-book, laid it before him.

"Accounts," he said. "Read same, learn same, be familiar with same." Then he returned to his own nervous and hurrying work.

Gail opened the book to an index—a list of products and companies. Glancing down the page some of the names smiled out at him familiarly:

Golden Soap. The Golden Products Corporation, Chicago, Ill.

Heart's Caress Perfumes. Hennessey of Paris (Inc.). Passaic, N. J.

Balmheal Lotion. Powerman-Slick, Inc., Hoboken, N. J.

Crackle. Pure Breakfast Foods. Inc., Watervliet. N. Y.

Purol. Four Seas Petroleum Products Corp., Jersey City, N. J.

Beyond were the even more familiar faces, figures, and words of the advertisements. Gail studied and learned them as the day wore on.

He was interrupted by the steely-eyed boy, who placed what appeared to be a roll of parchment tied in red ribbon on his desk. Out the corner of his eye he observed that one of these had been placed on each of the desks. Some of the men opened and read them; others, intensely occupied, ignored them; one or two put them into a lower drawer and slid the drawer shut. For a moment Gail meant to ignore his; then curiosity grew on him, as he looked out of his deep concentration at the mysterious roll. It must be an important

thing, this, so adorned; yet every one had one. So, with the appearance of a mechanical motion, performed without removing his eyes from the book before him, he slid off the ribbon and unrolled the parchment. When it was spread out before him he shifted his eyes to it distractedly, as at some undesired interruption.

It was a masterpiece of printing. In clear, beautiful type, each paragraph pointed by a paragraph mark in red, and properly spaced, it would be impossible to see and not to read.

ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE

was the vermilion head. Below it ran the pointed paragraphs:

> I want every man and woman, every boy and girl in this busy workshop to know how I think of them.
>
> I think of you all as one Big Happy Family, working together for the Truth and the Right and for each other.
>
> I think of you as of my own children; with pride and with love; pride in the duty it is yours to perform for the betterment of humanity; love for your loyalty to me, to each other and to your Cause.
>
> I want you to feel that in everything you do you are doing it not for yourselves but for the Whole; that only by a consistent Working Together can you preserve that Whole; that only by Constructive Together-Thinking and Together-Doing can you hope to make that Whole effective, Forward-Moving, and United.
>
> Remember that One greater than any of us said: “United we stand, divided we fall.”
>
> Remember that your duty to each other and to me is a duty to the Whole Profession which each one of us in his Small Way represents.
>
> Remember that I am watching you with a deep personal interest; ready to support you with that same Loyalty that I must feel for you, that you must feel for me, that each of us must feel for the Other, that all of us must feel for the Whole.
>
> B. Minturn Outwater.

About him was the sound of crinkling paper and the opening and shutting of drawers. With one shutting of a drawer there came a grunt that

sounded like a human voice uttering the word “Bunk,” though it might have come merely from a protesting drawer.

Gail opened his drawer and thrust the roll into it. In the open drawer lay a half-finished letter, which Gail unconsciously read, then, realizing it was a letter, thrust the parchment over it, and closed the drawer. But the words of the letter, taken in at a glance, were clear before his eyes when he went back to his study, and it stood between him and his accounts.

“Dear Father,” it read. “I am done—finished—fired. I can see nothing ahead. I am broke—cold broke. I cannot see why I deserved it. For God’s sake—” And at the bottom a scrawled “Willie.”

Gail looked up from his book to see a smooth young face looking down at him. It would have been a boy’s face but that at the corners of the mouth and eyes hard lines had fixed themselves, so that when he smiled it was with a certain effort, and the corners of his eyes and mouth wrinkled, somehow, the wrong way. But the eyes were of a faded blue softness, and now spoke friendliness to Gail.

“Winbourne, isn’t it? Rideout—John Rideout. Glad to know you. I’m on copy. It’s lunch-time for us, I guess. Will you lunch with me?”

Gail, though he had lived through this long morning on the hope of lunching with the Anarchs, said that he would like to lunch with him.

They went to the oyster-room of the Grand Central Station—because it was quick, Rideout explained. He had a hunted look as he said it.

“Man that had your desk was a good friend of mine,” he said, as they waited for lunch. Gail started slightly, thinking of the letter he wished he had not read, but whose tortured words persisted in his mind. “Good boy, but not good enough. He dropped out at the last S. F. Conference.”

“S. F.?” said Gail.

“Survival of the Fittest. That’s not the official name. Good boy, Willie Wade, but not up to this stuff. No personality.”

Gail winced and looked at the butter floating in his oyster stew.

“Got to have it in this game. Punch, too. Willie was the weak kind. Goes under.”

Gail noticed that Rideout had acquired Swift’s staccato habit. He thought a moment while Rideout began nervously to eat his stew, and then spoke with a little smile.

“I thought we were such a happy family.”

The corners of Rideout’s mouth were penetrated with difficulty by downward lines.

"Oh, that!" he said. For a moment Gail thought he saw a far-off light in his eyes, but instantly it was gone, and all his face hardened.

"Good stuff, though. There's a man has personality. Tell you, Winbourne, you can take a lot from that man you'd never take from any one else." He was fixing Gail with his blue eyes, and making him feel slightly uncomfortable. "He's electric. Dynamic. That's what you've got to have in this game. That and ideas, of course, in copy. I haven't got it. All I've got is ideas. I'm getting it, some. You'll get it. It's training that does it. I tell you, Winnie—you don't mind me calling you Winnie? You'll call me John, of course—I tell you, Winnie, a man's got a lot to learn in this game. If you last—I'm talking to you frankly, now, as man to man—if you last you'll get it. You can't help yourself. It gets you. Everything about it gets you. It's fascinating. It's a great, mysterious, fascinating game. You're working in the dark half the time, don't know what you're doing, or where you're getting. Don't know whether your stuff gets over. Consumer reaction is the most mysterious thing in all the world. You put out a bit of the finest subtle psychology you can think of—real, insidious consumer appeal; and you can't tell to save your soul how it'll react. It's just a kind of wave you start, like dropping a pebble in still water on a dark night; you see it splash, and you see the little ripples start out in ever-widening circles, but where they reach the shore it is dark, and you cannot see." He was leaning forward over the table now, and his face was close to Gail's. His eyes had gained new fire, and it seemed almost a new, deeper color had come into them. "Some of those ripples are going to break against the consumer consciousness and start new waves of thought within. Those waves will make tiny grooves in the mind, and later—much later, thought will flow along those grooves and action will follow thought. That's what we call consumer reaction. Think of sitting all day at your desk and dropping these thought pebbles into the silent pools of consciousness, and the waves—the waves of your thought—disturbing the consciousness of millions and millions of people throughout the world, and waking in them consumer reaction. It's tremendous."

He stopped, appalled at the bigness of his thought, and wiped his face.

"But," he went on, more quietly, "you can't be sure. You don't know but your ripples will strike some barren shore. That's where you have to consult the statistical department. They're the boys that tell you where to drop your pebbles, and what's become of all the pebbles that have been dropped, and so on. That's what the Old Man means by working together.

"But it's not everybody can do it. It's not everybody can think that way; it's not everybody has the imagination or the creative power or the personality. Don't make any mistake, Winnie, about this personality

business. Even in copy. It's the personality of your thought that makes it spread. It's the personality in it that makes it wake that note in the consciousness of the consumer. It's your personality meeting his that produces results. Personal contacts. And mind you, Winnie, personal contacts can be made as subtly and as perfectly by these waves of thought as they can talking to a man, face to face and man to man. No, not everybody can do it. There's poor Willie!"

He stopped suddenly, and a curious change came over his face. It was as if some carefully suppressed emotion struggled against his will for expression there. For an instant it softened, and the blue of the eyes faded. He looked through and beyond Gail, and there was friendliness and pity in his face for some remote object.

"Funny," he said, not addressing Gail. "He's just been married, too. Old Man persuaded him to. Good thing for a man, helps settle him down. Yes, helps his personality, too. But—" his eyes came slowly back to Gail's, the corners of his mouth hardened, and he shook his head slightly—a hardly perceptible motion, as if shaking off some weak and unworthy thought —"but you've got to make up your mind to the survival of the fittest. We all do. After all, it's just and right enough."

How much happier the man, thought Gail, who makes up his mind to the survival of the fittest. How happy Darwin, never disturbing himself about germs of corruption creeping in, because those properly armored against corruption were the fittest, and it was best for the others to be corrupted to make more room. Darwin, walking through the slums, as Gail sometimes did, seeing the children grovelling in the gutters and wasting and dying from hunger and filth and the vices of their elders, was content enough. Yet was he content? There was a mistake here, somewhere, when one came to the human species. Unfit beasts killed off, and right enough, but men—why this rebellion among men against the equitable scheme of nature? Why this struggle that the unfit be kept alive and tortured by their unfitness? Why this passionate pity for the diseased, the crippled, the blind, this yearning of the strong toward the weak; this increasing attempt to render the corruptible immune; this persistent interruption of the nicely ordered programme whereby the fit shall inherit the earth? And no argument, no logic, no obvious plausibility can prevail against it. This stupid animal, man, goes right on attempting to bear the just and proper sufferings of his fellows. Yet Darwin himself, and all the others of the survival belief, concede him to be immeasurably greater than the amœba, who makes no such effort. And thinking thus, as a great thinker must, thinking thus, when all his perfect

scheme is laid out and indexed and foot-noted and presented to an astonished but convinced world—is he, indeed, content?

So absorbed was Gail, at lunch with his new friend, in this speculation that not until the second time it was asked did he hear Rideout's question:

"You're married, of course?"

"Excuse me. Yes. Yes." Gail was ashamed at his wandering, and curiously embarrassed by the question. He blushed, and saw a quizzical, almost distrustful, look on Rideout's face.

"Great thing, isn't it? But you want to play safe. Watch your step. Don't get into Willie's box."

Gail suddenly felt he did not care.

"Got to watch your step. Once you're out it's hard these days to get another job. You wrote, didn't you? So did I. I guess most of us did. Well, you can't swing it on writing. With a wife and a two-year-old boy it's out of the question. I couldn't consider children at all when I was writing."

Great heavens, this child with a two-year-old boy! And time before the boy came to consider not having a boy!

"Twenty-four," said Rideout, in answer to Gail's astonishment. "Married at twenty. Hit this game at twenty-one. It was hell till I hit it. Hand to mouth. A story here and there, and lucky when I sold one for fifty dollars. Now, here I get—well, a steady salary—and writing just the same."

"Can you work on writing outside?"

"No—hell, no. Writing ads. Same thing. That is, same kind of energy goes into it. Creative. Uses the same muscles."

He was speaking faster now, and biting out his words.

"Well, le's go," he said, getting up hastily. "Good joint for a quick lunch. No two-hour lunches for us. Damn glad we had a chance to talk things over."

They made their way back through the whirling traffic. When they had crossed Forty-second Street Rideout pointed to an enormous sign covering the tops of three buildings, which set forth the virtues of a corset which was not called a corset, but which would make a girl look like a boy. A brightly colored illustration portrayed a girl upon whom this highly desirable transformation had been performed.

"See that?" said Rideout excitedly. "Enormous profits in sign business. Tell you a secret. Old Man's going to buy that outfit."

"The sign company?"

"Absolutely. Controls most of the space on two railroad lines, and here and there on a lot of turnpikes. Going to keep its name, though. You see that's why it's a secret. Bee won't hitch his name onto this kind of advertising—not quite dignified enough. Grand business. But of course we writers are too highbrow for that kind of stuff. They'll keep us where we're needed. No, sir, Winbourne and Rideout are the literary members of this outfit. Say, what's your front name, Winnie?"

"Gail."

"Gail Winbourne! Gosh, what a name for a writer. Do much writing?"

"Not much."

"Gail Winbourne on the back of a book! Oh, boy!"

"Bound in green morocco," said Gail. He attempted to smile, and discovered that the corners of his mouth resisted it.

The day dragged out dull enough for Gail. In the afternoon Mr. Swift gave him other very preliminary work to do, and told him how to do it, in his short, sharp, bitten words. When five o'clock came and he cleared his desk a heaviness descended upon him. He felt that never had he been so tired. He made his way down in the elevator and out into the cold street in a state of half-consciousness.

The apartment that Muriel had picked was an easy walk from his office, but as Gail progressed up the middle sidewalk of Park Avenue, his mind and his feet grew heavy, and his body ached. The day behind him was an age long; a gap stretched back to the remote moment when Muriel had kissed him at the door and heaped upon him wishes of good luck for the day; yet it was but space, nothingness, a blur, the only reality of all the day was her kiss and her good-by. And now, in this curious empty dream, there would be reality again in Muriel, a waking, as it were, and the closing up of the gap between; yet Gail, walking up the bare sidewalk between the lights that often enough had thrilled him out of melancholy, was listless and heavy in his heart.

Outside the new brick house in the fifties where Muriel had decided they should live, life came suddenly back to him; this thing was new; it held mysterious hopes; rooms yet unexplored; endless permutations of arrangement of their vast store of things in the little space; with a lighter step he climbed the newly painted stairs—so newly painted that his feet clung to them a little as he climbed, and found the door that responded quickly to his new key.

Muriel, her sleeves rolled up, her hair beautifully awry, and her face flushed, came running to him, and all the heaviness dropped from him in the

first touch of her. She relaxed utterly in his embrace, and they stood for a moment in silence; then, curiously, he found himself sobbing; sobbing for the first time since the child days, when tears came easily; sobbing now with the painful wracking sobs of one who has long lost this medium of expression.

It is an interesting thing that the tears of a woman, be they frequent as April rains, are incomprehensible to man, and leave him helpless, yet the rare weeping of a man—be it once in a lifetime of restraint—is perfectly and instantly understood by the least understanding of women; so came it that Muriel, after a startled moment, did exactly what was necessary, which was to remain silent in his arms.

Gail loved her for that interval of silence—loved her always in later, difficult hours when he remembered it.

They spent a happy evening, the happiest Gail had known; quietly happy, with no thought of the day and no word of it spoken.

They arranged things about the rooms with much gibing at each other, and kisses to heal the gibes that had not hurt, and then long, quiet talk, and at last everything absorbed in love.

They were happy hours for Gail; that evening, long to be remembered, was a helpful punctuation in a life that seemed settled to slow movement down a drab and dusty road.

XII

A LIFE that seemed settled and slow-moving; so it had seemed to Gail in the first few days after he had taken his place in the great game of Publicity. So it had seemed, and far ahead stretched the road in its immutable drab dustiness, and at the sight of it Gail became obsessed by the heavy gloom of youth. For there is no season (notwithstanding our ardent desire for it when it is gone) at which life appears so immutable in whatever aspect we regard it; at happy moments the happiness is vistaed into eternity; in moments of misery hope is blotted out for all time.

At home there were adjustments. The subject of the Game came to be carefully evaded in their talk, for Gail's cynicism, descending on Muriel's first enthusiastic questions, produced words, and not seldom tears, followed by that curious sensation of having become strangers to each other, which interfered with happiness. During these first little altercations the conviction grew upon Gail that many of the things which he thought funny Muriel did not think were funny at all, and that the difference between the response of two persons to a supposedly funny thing was a pretty fundamental business. By and by he found himself cataloguing definitely the things which were not funny. The Game, for instance, was never funny. The beginning of any anecdote connected with it brought an instant shadow of worry to Muriel's face, long before she discovered what it was about. It became evident that she believed herself personally responsible for the advertising business in general, and all its aspects since the beginning of the world, and that any humorous mention of it was a personal affront.

So Gail, by degrees, half-consciously, schooled himself against funny things, and they devoted themselves to the expression of love which, by no one engaged in it, could possibly be regarded as anything but the most serious thing in the world.

Things, of course, provided an occupation and a subject of talk which could never go beyond the limits of amicability. Disputes between them of the most apparently furious nature, on the arrangement of furniture, food, clothes, servants, laundry, could be dismissed and instantly forgotten. They could laugh and joke and hurl sarcasm at each other provided these subjects were scrupulously adhered to, and all would be well; but once let the topic

of Gail's career or his future be introduced, and they would go to bed with their faces turned each toward his respective wall and an abyss between.

So at home, when Gail had learned the taboo, life progressed through a period of happiness. At the office he sank into a dull despond. He learned by heart the accounts, absorbed a fundamental conception of copy methods by a long perusal of advertisements, went through the routine of checking—by which it was determined to the firm's satisfaction that advertisements were inserted where paid for and given their due in position, printing, and registration of color-plates; he acquired an understanding of the office machinery and its departments, and thus passed through the discipline phase of B. Minturn's system.

One day, at the end of a few weeks of this, the old west-window restlessness came back to him, and he got up to cleanse his mind with the haze of the fairy city below. His brain reeled from the panorama that, in his endless checking, had just passed before it: a panorama of painted women regarding, in mirrors, their rejuvenated complexions; of wet and naked children scrambling for the coveted soap; of ladies and gentlemen displaying to each other, with pleasant abandon, the fit of their underwear; of impossibly rosy-cheeked boys contemplating in ecstasy the tablespoonful of cod-liver oil held for their delectation; of obese little girls reaching greedily for the sugar-plum which was, in reality, merely "nature's aid to the necessary internal processes"; and of all the intricacies and intimacies of the boudoir, the bathroom, the teeth, and the digestion.

There below, the hard edges of things were softened, and the city lay faint and unreal under the golden afternoon; there below, no doubt, humanity plodded heavily; in the many-windowed houses under the sooty roofs were, perhaps, all manner of sorrow, evil, and uncleanness, but to Gail, in this dreamy, tired pause, the people were but lazy insects, the buildings palaces and fairy towers of old gold, the harbor at the end the misty boundary of the world, beyond which—beyond which——

And his mind drifting thus did not compass the change that had come so quickly in the office behind him, where heads were suddenly lifted, eyes snapped into alertness, bodies tautened, and all the air tensed into a strain of concentration. Nor did he, drifting thus, feel the hand laid on his shoulder, except as a vague incident in his dream. Nor did he come fully back into the focus of things real till the hand had whirled him about, and he saw the jaw of a heavy face grow taut and thrust itself out at him; two steel points of eyes flashed their electric current toward his, and he was caught in the instant into the circuit.

The new, quickening force of it tingled through him, his eyes clicked into line, all the muscles down his body hardened; instantly he was alert, the cock of his personality turned on full. And with the meeting of these wills and the quick subordination of Gail's, the other face relaxed into a half smile.

"Dreaming, my boy? Dreaming, eh? Dreaming! Right! Good boy! Remember, though, 'if you can dream and not make dreams your master,' my old text!" It occurred to Gail afterward that many men had found a use for that text. "Remember that, my boy; always remember that! I'm afraid they were your master a moment ago—just for one little moment, my boy. Watch it! Watch it! I lost myself sometimes that way when I was young." The face was tight again, the corners of the mouth hardened.

"And now," the voice went on, "I'll want you a moment in conference." He whirled and marched away. As at a magic word, heads were raised through the room, and hushed whispers started out of the corners. Gail heard them as he passed automatically after the chief, heard breathed a single word, over and over, an awed, sibilant sound on the tensed air, "conference . . . conference . . ." with the last *c* hissed and whistled.

Behind a closed mahogany door six men sat at a long mahogany table. They were immaculately dressed in dark tweeds, their faces shaved to a clean blue, their collars flashing spotless white. As Gail looked down the line of faces and easily lounging bodies, the whole scene became suddenly reminiscent to him. Somewhere in the panorama that had unrolled before his mind these last few days the picture of this room, with grave faces like these about the table, had flashed repeatedly by. The young man standing by the door had stood and gesticulated with his arms, and delivered himself somewhat thus: "You men have let this business run to seed. You men, old and experienced enough to know better, have fumbled, foozled, slam-banged your way along because you lacked the key to system—efficiency! I can see it! See it in your faces. See it in your product. See it in your books. See it in your sales statistics!"

And beneath the picture he remembered the thrilling words: "You too, at twenty-eight, can reorganize, rebuild old established businesses."

But now the young man standing by the door was Gail, and he took his seat quietly by the foot of the table and prepared himself, modestly, to mingle his personality with theirs.

B. Minturn returned to his seat at the head of the table, and conversation hushed.

"Young blood," he said, indicating Gail. "I'll let him try his hand."

There was a pause while the grave men turned their grave eyes on Gail, and Gail looked back into the eyes of each of them.

There was something standardized about these faces, like all the machinery of the Outwater office; they had settled, according to a definite formula. There were the same lines about their set mouths. There was the same deep gravity that would relax momentarily and in unison when the proper formula was presented; in their relaxing they would again move in a prescribed smile—not too much, not too little, and always quite adapted to the demands of the particular situation.

Yet, cast in a mould as they were, Gail isolated several types. There was the man who smokes the cigarette "everyone comes back to"; there was the man who sets the collar fashions; there was the man who stands by the fireplace in his underclothes; the man who sits at his desk and looks out the window at his factory chimneys.

"Gentlemen," Mr. Outwater continued, and the grave eyes moved back, "we are confronted by a serious problem. I cannot remember, in the course of my thirty-five years' experience in the Game, so difficult a problem as that which confronts us to-day. I cannot remember, likewise, gentlemen, a period in the history of advertising so fraught with the disturbing factors of competition. Mind you, gentlemen, we are not in the primitive days when psychological reactions were simple, when the stimuli of consumer appeal were few, and any new feeler thrust forward into the maelstrom of buyer consciousness struck sparks from the anvil of demand. Now, gentlemen, I tell you there is nothing new under the sun. I may have told you that before, since I originated the epigram. Mark that! Make a mental note of it—there is nothing new under the sun! And we have got to that crossroads in our activity to-day, gentlemen, when something new must be found. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

For a moment the grave eyes registered doubt, then, simultaneously, they registered determination. Something must be done.

"The fact is, my friends," B. Minturn went on, leaving a pause in dramatic anticipation of the thrilling words to come, "the fact is, we have just acquired the Jacob B. Olfleisch account."

An audible gasp followed this announcement. If he had just stated that at four fifteen sharp the universe would be dissolved, no greater amazement could have appeared on the faces opposite Gail. The man at the foot of the table seized a pad, printed hurriedly on it, and passed it to Gail. Gail read SHEWANTSA COMPANY BEAUTY CREAMS, in quick, neat lettering. He clicked his eye alertly at the writer, and indicated his appreciation.

"Mr. Olfleisch," the oracle went on, "is dissatisfied with Thayer-Mandeville. He says their work for the past year has been consistently old stuff. So he has handed his problem over to us. I do not doubt that you gentlemen appreciate the meaning of this. I can see it in your faces.

"Now, gentlemen, it is not customary for me to call you into conference every time we get a new account. But this time I want to impress upon you that the moment has arrived with this tremendous stroke of fortune—or, shall I say, salesmanship—" he smiled with a touch of complacency—"to make a new start, and when I say make a new start"—he brought his clenched fist down on the mahogany desk and rose menacingly to his feet—"when I say a new start, I mean turn over a new leaf, start again at our beginnings; begin, gentlemen, begin!" He threw out his hand in a broad arc in front of him, wiping out the established universe as it then stood, to make way for the new one he was about to establish. Gail had an impression of planets crumbling in their path, of suns dying to a spark and going out.

At the descent of Mr. Outwater's fist something had jumped in each of the grave men. Now, as he stood leaning forward, with his hands on the end of the table, every eye looked toward his; there seemed to be little lines of strain in the air between those pairs of eyes. But the chief's eyes, as Gail involuntarily looked into them, seemed to be looking straight at him and at no other; seemed to be concentrated on him, burning through his into the mind beyond. He wondered, for an illogical second, if each of the men at the table thought himself the object of this deep, penetrating scrutiny. But at the first words he knew, for suddenly the chief's finger shot out at him, and his heart leaped up.

"You, sir!" he thundered. "You, young man, hear what I say. We are going to turn over a new leaf. When we turn over a new leaf we need young men—young blood. That's why I asked you in here to collaborate with these tried minds. We have been dying in this place of dry-rot. The copy has dry-rotted, the art has dry-rotted, the wheels of the traffic have rusted and the gears have clogged; moths and dust have corrupted our ideas, our layouts, our writing, our typography. Every phase of this business is drying up!" He pointed each of his remarks by clicking his eyes in succession at each of the men at the table, and each wilted, as a plant might wilt in a ray concentrated through a glass from a tropic sun.

"You, Winbourne!"

It was an awful and tremendous moment. It was a dramatic moment. It was a climactic moment, an apex from which one soared into the sky or tumbled to the dead earth. Eyes looked at him, expecting. He was the centre

of the stage, spot-lighted; young blood, brave thought, new life—Gail Winbourne! Yet in the grand moment he stumbled and fell.

"I'll do my best, sir," he said, and his voice, in its unhappy manner, broke and quavered.

The dozen eyes dropped, and a faint ironic quirk grew round the lips of Swift, the head of the copy department.

"And now," said Mr. Outwater, as if Gail's quivering sentence had never reached his ears, "I'll tell you what I want."

It was evident that the final phase of the conference had begun. A general movement, like a wave, swept through the room. Six hands reached out and grasped six paper pads and pencils, and the men indicated their concentration by drawing designs on the paper before them. Involuntarily Gail's hand, too, reached out, though his eyes were focussed on the cubes which his right-hand neighbor was attempting, without success, to execute upon his tablet.

"It seems," Mr. Outwater's voice took on the quality of one beginning a story, "it seems that Mr. Olfleisch's company has evolved a new lotion. Heretofore his products have been, primarily, women's commodities. I need not enumerate the achievements of the 'Shewantsa Company.'" He proceeded to enumerate them. "This super-lotion, however, is intended for the use of men." He bit out the word "men," and startled Gail out of his pleasant absorption. "And when I say men, I mean he-men, with red blood in them, not tea-drinkers."

Each of the listeners expressed in his face a disavowal of tea-drinking and smiled gently in appreciation of the fact that the chief had introduced a note of humor.

"The lotion," the chief went on, without indicating the slightest consciousness of his own wit, "is the result of years of experiment in the famous Shewantsa Laboratories. It is a formula subtly adapted to male needs—essentially a virile formula. I need not go into its ingredients, though I have them here." He reached among his papers, drew out a typed sheet and read it carefully. "But it is not the ingredients, as Mr. Olfleisch pointed out in my conference with him, which makes the lotion. It is their subtle blending." He moved his hand in small circles. "They are so blended—" he drew out another paper and read it in a droning voice which wandered slowly out of Gail's ken.

His voice wandered out of Gail's ken because somewhere in the labyrinthic depths of Gail's psychology a reaction was achieving itself.

Now, whether this reaction was the result of a long series of stages in the process called evolution, or whether it came from without—from that vague nomansland that is said to surround us, and from which some believe that these strange and apparently inspirational impulses attack us, is not a question for the spectator-historian. Suffice it for us that Gail, from childhood, had never been able to sit with pencil poised over a sheet of entirely blank paper without a transference to that medium of some fruit of creation.

Thus, in the midst of his chief's encomium of Vitapore, the super-skin-lotion for men, Gail irreverently transported himself into a trance, twisted his legs in incredible tangles about the chair which none but high priests had hitherto defiled, thrust his fingers heedless through his patiently slicked hair until it started out in a wildly disordered halo, and hunched himself generally into a figure calculated to set the insulted gods aghast.

And thus he remained until the clenched fist of the highest of the high priests descended, for the last time, upon the eloquent conclusion of his speech, and brought Gail back down a long dreamy road to the consciousness of his mahogany environment.

There was a silence, and Gail blinked his eyes.

"My God!" whispered the man next him, looking over his shoulder. Then he became dully conscious that the man next him had taken the pad of paper from before him, and was whispering over it to the man at the foot of the table.

"My God, Winbourne," echoed Mr. Outwater from the other end, and fixing his eyes on Gail, "have you been dreaming again?"

"Working, sir," said Gail, with sudden remembrance of his personality.

"Working?" said Mr. Outwater. "You certainly presented a most extraordinary spectacle!"

Three of the grave men smiled cynically, as if saying to themselves: "Young blood, huh!" but the other three continued to whisper.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Outwater, with the air of pronouncing the final word on the destinies of mankind, "the conference is at an end."

There was the muffled sound of heavy chairs moved back over the thick carpet, and a slow raising of bodies. Gail got up with the rest, but the chief beckoned to him.

"Let me see the results of your work."

Of a sudden the whispers next Gail ceased, and the tablet of paper on which his trance had been recorded was slid back to him. He picked it up

and moved into the sacred precincts.

There was a long interval of quiet while the highest of the high priests sat contemplating the sacrifice of the lowest neophyte. One by one the other priests tiptoed out, and a little acolyte tiptoed in and extinguished five Of the seven lights, and performed little functions about the altar. Then he, too, was gone. The incense faded on the air, the warmth of worship died, and the Temple grew dim and cold.

It was immeasurably long that Gail waited. When the waiting was over and the high priest spoke it seemed that life had stopped and gone on again. And in a measure this was true, for with his words Gail's life began a new phase.

"My boy," he said, and his voice was strangely gentle, "do not misunderstand me. Your work is crude. It shows inexperience. But I want you to know that it has the spark. There is a quality in it that will carry you far. It has the quality that I looked for, hoped for, in you—the quality of youth, of life. I rarely make a mistake. I picked you for a live wire, and I believe you have it in you to become one. I believe you have the ability to do big things in a big way. I believe you can show these—these—" his vocabulary failed him in this necessary moment, as he swept his arm toward the empty chairs, "these men something about live copy. Mind you, I am thinking aloud. You must not take me too literally. You have much to learn —much. There is much that these—these men can teach you." He paused in an attitude of deep absorption, his hand clenched under his chin.

Gail's eyes wandered to the pad of paper on which he had created. He longed to hold it again in his hands; to fondle it with the new pride the chief's words had given him.

Then, suddenly, as if reading his thought, Mr. Outwater tossed the pad over to him.

"Here," he said, "read it yourself and see what you think of it."

Gail reached out tenderly and took this new child in his hands, and his fingers tingled. It was his, this new life before him, the full fruit of his mind's burgeoning. Knowing him, acknowledging him, sending back to him the glow of pride in his eyes.

Have we said that Gail's life had begun a new phase? Yet was not the same force, after all, impelling him on down this new path beyond the road fork? Full many a man has trod it, is treading it, in these strange days, impelled still by the same force. Full many a man has come to this forking of the ways, stood lingering an instant, and gone on down Gail's road to happy prosperity.

Gail took the paper tenderly in his hands. And this is what he read:

IS PROHIBITION SKIN-DEEP?

Has Prohibition got under your skin? Do you thirst sometimes for that "one little drink" that used to send a glow through your body in the weary hour between work and rest?

Do you sag now with the day's fatigue? Does the mirror show new lines? A hardening, perhaps, at the corners of the mouth that make smiling a little difficult? Would you like to be able to send a flush of real health through that tired face?

Did you ever realize that your skin thirsts for refreshment and stimulation? Did you know that the millions of its tiny mouths are parched for the need of a vitalizing drink? That the right kind of tonic will do your skin a thousand times more good than the best of alcoholic cocktails could ever do *you*?

TEN MILLION COCKTAILS

enter the pores of your skin with each application of VITAPORE. Yet each of them is true tonic to the thirsty mouth that receives it. Each of them is a builder of infinitesimal tissues. Together they produce a glow as freshening as the west wind, as warming as the summer sun.

Try it after shaving. Try it again at that tired time after the day at the office. Dash it over your face with both hands. Try it at bedtime and sleep in the luxury of clean health.

VITAPORE
FOR MEN
NATURE'S DRINK FOR TIRED SKINS

He looked up when he had read it twice, and there was a new light in his eyes, which Mr. Outwater took, no doubt, for kindling personality.

"It seems as if I *had* hit something there," he said.

"You've hit something, my boy. Mind you, I say *something*. I do not say much. It is all promise. But I'll tell you what I'll do, boy." He paused, as if regretting his words, and Gail waited, patient and eager. After a few moments' profound thought he galvanized with decision.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he repeated. His jaw was set, and the words seemed to come from somewhere deep within him and with no articulation

of his face. All its lines had hardened as if they had suddenly gone into stone. It was a magnificent face of awful power.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, by God! I'll give you charge of the campaign!"

Napoleon astride his charger, commanding with a sweep of his hand a conquest of worlds, was never grander than, in this moment of his supreme decision, was B. Minturn Outwater, Publicity Adviser and Emperor of new-found and super-lotion.

"Now go," he said, rising to his full height and pointing to the door. "Go and work! Not dream! Work! We'll show these fiddling, fussy old women something."

The last words were hissed between clenched teeth, but Gail heard them, and they perched on the top of his mind. They were there when he opened the door and heard it close behind him and faced the vista of desks. They were there, teetering back and forth to keep their balance, as he moved down the vista, level-eyed, and saw in the edges of his sight the faces raised to look at him as he passed by. Jealous faces, ironic faces, openly sneering faces, winking and nudging faces. He saw them all, and thought: "Fiddling, fussy old women! We'll show them something!"

We would! We: the high priest and Gail. It was a large and pleasing thought. How easy it was! The impulse and the facility to create; intelligence —the simple ability to look at black and white and tell them apart—easy flow of thought, quick expression, wit! There was no limit to it in this world of fussy, fiddling old women.

How few there were intelligent! Blank, ungrooved minds, hard. It was like working in marble with wooden tools to impress these resistant substances with thought. Those grave men in conference, with their set faces and all the plasticity gone out of their brains! With a hammer and a chisel one carved a line; once there it was ineffaceable, and forever after all motive, all thought, just trickled along it, wearing it deeper.

But there was more to it than that. For nowhere under that solemn and beautifully finished covering was there any fire of force, any source of power, any self-motivating machine, any initiator of impulse. Every motion was actuated from without. The whole of this interaction was organized and then moved by one mind, which was capable by the extraordinary functioning of its energy to hold it in place and work with it, a single will. Occasionally, one element strayed away, and "fiddled and fussed," and until it was put back, or eliminated, the performance was askew. Sometimes, to be sure, the directing mind could relax and the thing ran of its momentum, repeating the motion in process at the moment of relaxing. This, no doubt,

was what had happened during the period described by Mr. Outwater with so amazing a succession of metaphors, when moths had corrupted and the wheels grown rusty.

But now here was Gail, a new mind, original impulse. One who had arrived via evolution a creator, whose whole business of life had been creation! (It was almost shamefully easy, this.) One who had written life, who had made men and women, breathing, thinking creatures; who had juggled the circumstances of the eternal scheme for their doing and undoing; who had toyed with the elemental forces of love and fear; who had sat at wine with Truth, commanded beauty, and adjusted the divine Humor to the plan of his contriving! (The divine Humor. It was a sounding thought. Did one adjust the divine Humor? Or was Humor of all the divinities the one absolute who adjusted all creatures to his whim?) This, then, was the new mind for this childish task. And these marionettes had sneered, and nudged, and winked!

Gail had the feeling that a shot-putter has when, after an hour's practice with the shot, he throws a baseball. Or that of a race-horse, when his weights are suddenly removed before his race. It was a light and pleasing feeling. And the way ahead was bright with promise. The great chief himself had said so.

Then, in the curious way that one remembers things that have been invisible to the conscious mind, he remembered that Rideout's face had been one of those he had seen. Perhaps it had impressed itself on his more than usually plastic mind because it was the one of all which had not looked at him. It came back to him now, at his desk, with startling vividness; with the blood run out of it and eyes that did not see staring straight ahead. Had he seen that face, or dreamed it, or created it out of those fecund depths whence all of this new life should flow so easily?

The days were lengthening in that waning February, and on that mild afternoon through which the sun had shone warm with its first treacherous promise of spring it was still light when the building disgorged its multitude and Gail crowded out with the rest into the fresh street. It was still light, fading light; that interlude when the air acquires a quality of thickness, of suspended gray, and little lights pricked into it from windows and street-lamps.

Gail moved through it with heavy feet. It was curious how tired he got at this easy game. But there had been exhilaration this day, and presumably now he felt reaction. Adjustable word, "reaction"; it would mean almost anything one wanted. Gail had shunned it these last years of its revived popularity. Why had he shunned it? Why shun these simple colloquial

usages? Why complicate and multiply the necessities of language? Had writing done that for him—this picking over and quibbling over words? After all, the people in the game talked directly enough; their meanings were obvious—it was a freshening thing, the game. No affectation—not very much self-consciousness in this straight thinking. Straight thinking? What an infernally questioning mind he had! Was there no way of training it out of its eternal interrogation? Yes, there was a way. And Gail was finding it.

On Park Avenue he ran suddenly into Arkway of the Anarchs, ran literally into him, bumping, apologizing, then recognizing, half ashamed. He was a little embarrassed by Arkway of the Anarchs.

"Why, Gail!" said Arkway. "Why, if it isn't Gail! Why, I'll be damned."

Gail announced that he, too, would be damned, though with less conviction; but there, somehow, there seemed an end of it. They looked at each other in a paralyzed silence. Then they both began at once:

"Well——"

Arkway, being an Anarch, spanned the gap.

"Well, Gail, how—when—where the devil have you been hiding?"

Gail smiled, and said:

"I've been hiding in publicity."

Arkway laughed, and the ice cracked slightly.

"Good old Gail! But publicity? Publicity? I haven't seen your name in print."

"No, no; the publicity profess—er—game."

"Oh! Oh, yes, advertising." His voice lowered as if he were mentioning something slightly obscene. "But why don't you come around to the Anarchs? You never come any more."

They had started walking in Gail's direction.

"Why, somehow, I haven't had time. Getting married, you know, and—well, getting married is a serious business."

"Oh, Gail! Nothing is a serious business with you!" They were getting back gradually across a gulf. Gail pondered the question.

"I don't know," he said. "I believe there is something in settling down a bit."

"Oh, Gail!" There was a little touch of despair in his voice. Then another silence came. Why had he run into Arkway? Why, now, on his way home to tell good news to Muriel—the first good news he had ever had for her—had he run into Arkway? They had walked a block or more when Arkway said: "Don't you need a drink?"

"No," said Gail. Perhaps he needed a drink. He was so tired. How good a drink would be, thrilling hot blood along his veins. Ten million cocktails. . . .

Arkway had stopped.

"Here! I was on my way to the Anarchs for cocktail time. Come back with me. The boys will go crazy when they see you."

"Oh, no, I can't," said Gail, with longing.

But Arkway had put his arm through his and turned him round.

The Anarchs did not go crazy when they saw Gail. They said they would be damned, as Arkway had said, and there ensued little silences. But when the drinks had been jingled and poured, and jingled again, they warmed and talked. Gail drank his very fast—two or three—and warmed and laughed, and forgot the silences and the fact that the Anarchs had not gone crazy.

Yet he did not entirely forget. For, by a curious phenomenon which drinking always brought him, he had split, inwardly, into two halves. One half was gay, sparkling with thought, inconsequential, ludicrous; the other was deep and solemn, like Truth. And Truth kept talking, a low bass, in accompaniment to the light treble of his spoken words.

"You see," he was explaining to two or three who had clung about him, urging him to drink, "you see, I haven't stopped writing. Far from it. I write in the evenings. Got a novel nearly done. Going to finish it by May. No, my work doesn't interfere a bit. You see, I've got to live. You see I had to get—I got married, and I had to make my living and support my wife. You must come around. Nice little place."

Underneath, the other voice was saying: "I've stopped writing. I never write in the evenings. My novel died months ago. I'll never finish it. I'm too tired to work on it. Don't ever come to see me."

He drank another cocktail and a finger of words reached out from a far corner in the way that isolated words often do in such moments and drew Gail away. He went into the corner and found some one reciting limericks.

"It's tremendous," he said at the end of one, clapping the back of the poet. "It's literature!" He exulted in a long, ecstatic laugh. It seemed at the moment that nothing had ever been so funny as that limerick. But when the laugh stopped the deep voice within him echoed:

"Literature. Literature."

And during the next limerick a dialogue went on between his two halves:

"What right have you to talk about literature?" said the bass.

"It's literature that's got me where I am now," said the treble, a little shakily.

“Where are you now?”

“Where am I now!”

“Where are you now?”

“I’m a dominating force.”

A laugh from the Anarchs at the limerick Gail had not heard rang through the room and the bass voice within him laughed with it.

“It’s words,” went on the treble, when the next limerick had begun, “words that got me where I am now.”

“Skin-deep,” said the bass, and the laugh rang out again.

“Leave me alone,” said the treble. “I’m here with old friends, this tremendous evening.”

“The last,” said the bass. “The last evening. And not very tremendous. And not friends. Not friends. Not friends.”

Yet they were the Anarchs. There was no change in any of them. There was no change in the room, nor in the old dusty creaking staircase that had played its protesting plaintive tune when he and Arkway had creaked up it. These people were still friendly to him in their gay, cynical way—yet there had been an interval of embarrassment. Perhaps in the long time of his absence—especially in these last months—they had talked about him, talked him over, and decided—no, Anarchs never decided anything. In the Game they decided, but not Anarchs. The same Anarchs, the same room, the same talk, the same flickering candles, the same dust, the same . . .

In the other corner some one was wandering languidly over the piano with yearning, Debussy chords. Questioningly, wistfully, they searched about for some lost thing; and somebody, trying to supply the loss, whistled an uncertain melody up and down the whole-tone scale. The melody and the chords were utterly at variance with each other, yet in a sad sort of harmony, as if they were trying to meet, yet knowing they could not. Then the whistled melody changed as if caught in a sudden whim and became a very young and simple tune that laughed at the chords. Instantly it twined itself in Gail’s memory; somewhere, in some forbidden past, it had laughed thus out of a hidden flute in wet spring woods, where yellow sun spotted the boughs dripping with the night’s secret rain and little living things whispered intimate memories and hushed promises.

Then the melody and the memory and Gail’s exquisite pain died, and in the vague interval of mingled sounds that followed he slipped out of the room and down the tune of the stairs.

In the cold street, as he hurried along, keeping step to the drumming of his ears, he said:

"Young love laughing," forgetting in his heightened mood that young love never laughs.

"Love," he repeated aloud. "Love. It's all you've got left. Keep it. Make the most of it."

A passer-by turned to look at him, and turned back to his own thought in the cynical manner of passers-by in the city.

Love, indeed, was all. It is something. But it is a serious thing; not a laughing thing; not a light thing; rarely funny. The laughing things and the funny things had faded; the world was no longer ridiculous. Had age made it less so?—his age, to be sure, not the world's. No, it was immensely serious; life was very definite; a fight; one fought and pushed and emerged on top or fell—or others fell. Why had Hideout looked so bloodless, so unseeing?

But there was love. All-comprehending, all-consuming, all-levelling love. And love was his. To-night . . .

Yet when he opened the door of his apartment Muriel drew back, and said:

"Why, Gail! Where have you been drinking?"

XIII

MURIEL WINBOURNE, rapidly dispensing the daily tasks of her household, found abundance of time for meditation. Being a creature of single mind, she occupied much of this leisure with thought of Gail. She thought of him, primarily, as a possession, acquired not altogether without difficulty, which must, at all costs, be held. A possession to which she was singly and utterly devoted, and which must, in turn, be singly and utterly devoted to her. He had his career, to be sure—that, too, not without difficulty, she had arranged, distracting him from one, perhaps, too well loved—but all men had their careers, and labored at them with a devotion second only to their devotion to their wives. There was no danger, now, of Gail supplanting her by his career. One loved an art with an unnatural and monstrous love, but a business—no. A business was a sound thing. She had heard of men absorbed in business to the exclusion of their homes, but of such was not Gail.

He must have his friends, of course; only the selfish woman cut a man off from his men friends, but Gail had shown no disposition to intercourse with his friends. He spoke vaguely of his Anarchists—no, Anarchs (she had meant to look up the word in the dictionary)—but these were far-away creatures, shed long since with his silly writing aspirations. Other women? Probably not. Gail was what she described in the privacy of her mind as a "clean boy." Thank Heaven, in these days! He had kept himself for her and would always keep himself for her.

But on the night when Gail had arrived, pungent with the aura of his Anarch exhilaration, an uneasiness attacked her. It will be remembered that her first words to him on that occasion were not "Gail! You have been drinking?" but "Gail! Where have you been drinking?"

The drink, in fact, had not been—as with many another woman whose string of jealousy stretched in another direction—uppermost in her mind. Drink in itself held for her no horror. She and Gail had drunk together in the incredibly happy period of their honeymoon when, body and soul, he had been utterly hers, had drunk, in fact, to points of great merriment and delight; drinking, officially a sin, had an adventurous lure for her. But now, Gail for his drinking had found some alien company more congenial than hers.

There had been no scene on that evening when, at her question, the warmth and the love had suddenly withdrawn from Gail's heart. Beyond a question or two about the Anarchs they had lapsed into an uneasy silence. Gail did not tell Muriel about the developments in the game. They went to bed early, with their faces toward the walls, and Gail fell almost instantly into a profound sleep.

But in the manner of persons who indulge, as they say, well, if not wisely, in the forbidden drink, he woke before the dawn and tossed. He tossed and thought. He thought with great clarity, his mind purged by his dreamless sleep of all emotion.

The evening had been the last with the Anarchs. That had been several times iterated in his confused brain. It closed a phase positively and definitely. Before him was the Game—business. It had been a hated word. People rolled it in their mouths, tasting it with their tongues. It was a sacred word. It was a criterion. Men said to their wives: "If I ran my business the way you run this house—" He remembered overhearing a trustee of his school say to the head master: "Sir, I couldn't run my business six months on the principles on which you run this school."

He had read an interview in the paper between a church vestryman and a church rector, in which the vestryman was quoted as saying: "Remember, Doctor——, a church, like everything else, is a business." J. Simpson Hartwell had spoken of the "business" of writing. It was the universal standard, and Gail had despised it.

He did not despise it now. Not that his feeling had changed, perhaps, but rather now that he had no capacity for such emotion. At the moment everything was logical, clear, ordered. Business was part of the scheme of an ordered world. It had an equal value with every other element.

With the clarity of his consciousness, came a sense of power.

"I shall transcend these words," he said, with a very definite sense of what he meant. "I shall transcend business. I shall grow strong in this little game, direct its pawns to do my will, make money, wield an immense power, and then drop it and laugh at it. I shall show the world," he envisaged a vast crowd below him with upturned faces, "that this thing was a *means to an end*. Then I shall write. Then—I—shall—write!"

He said the words aloud, slowly, with profound impressiveness. There was no bass voice to mock him now. A little shiver ran down his backbone at the sound of the words in the silence.

"And I shall laugh."

He laughed, loud and long, and Muriel awoke, mumbling faintly. He was glad that he had waked her. Now he would tell her.

"Was that you laughing, Ga-il?"

"Yes."

"What were you laughing at?"

"At the world."

"At the world?"

He was silent. There was a long silence while Muriel came slowly to the conclusion that it would be best for her to stay awake.

"What's funny about the world?"

"Funny? Why, do you realize what I'm going to do?"

He did not suppose that she realized. His question was what is known as rhetorical. So he told her as impressively as one can while lying on his back in bed, that he had determined to be great in the profession of publicity, and had found the way easy. He told her that there was no limit to what a man might do who had arrived at this determination. He told her that he would ascend to the summit of power, and from there control the movements of great industries. He did not add, however, as in his earlier soliloquy, that, having attained this height, he would then spit upon the marionettes below him, laugh at the world, and write. He did not tell her this because, in his excitement, he had forgotten it.

Out of the silence following his eloquence Muriel evolved a great thought.

"And then we could have a car!" she said.

"A car!" said Gail, while amazing visions whirled before him. "Why, we can have a dozen cars!" This, however, even in his exaltation, appeared to him as funny. "If we want them," he added.

Muriel laughed and said: "Of course we won't need a dozen cars! But servants, Gail!"

"In livery," said Gail, "with red knee-breeches."

"Blue," said Muriel. "Dark blue and waistcoats with sideways stripes on them."

"I like red," said Gail, "or purple. It's more symbolical of power. I like power."

"Not vulgar power, Gail."

"Purple wouldn't be vulgar. And we shall have a long, low, Georgian house." Gail's architectural concepts were vague, but Georgian had a

pleasant sound.

"I rather fancy a villa."

"That *would* be vulgar."

"On a hill."

"Of course, on a hill. That's symbolical. But not a villa. A long, low, Georgian house on a hill, with a long, hazy valley stretched out below us."

Something clutched at Gail's heart, and a vague pain of memory silenced him. The Georgian house faded and dwindled into a cluster of little farm buildings behind a row of poplars.

"I think," he said, "a farmhouse would be better, with poplars in front, and scraggly pasture with stones and little cedars sloping slowly into the valley."

"I know a place," said Muriel.

Gail pressed her hand and they said nothing. It was an intimate silence.

"But," said Muriel, breaking the spell, "one can hardly work in New York and live in Glenvil."

Gail released her hand and withdrew slightly. To be sure, this was a spaced and tuned world. One might touch the pendulum and stop it, but another would start it going again and advance the hands to cover the loss.

"Of course," said Gail.

Dawn came on apace, and the edges of things began to show. Sunlight came suddenly through the window.

"Day!" said Gail. "Day of power!"

He sat up in bed with the exhilaration of the thought. It was an unfortunate movement. A quick, sharp pain struck through his head, and nausea rose within him, and all the clarity was gone from his brain. He fell back with a groan.

"What?" said Muriel with alarm.

"Oh," said Gail, putting his hand to his head. He turned over and buried his face.

"It's no good," he muttered into the depths of the pillow. "It's no good. There isn't any power. It's gone."

"Darling!"

There are moments when much comfort is concentrated in that ancient word.

XIV

THE office, filled with the sunlight of a dry, cold, February day, and tense with the rapid movement of interacting minds, would have been inspiriting to one whose health was shaded by a far deeper debauch than Gail's at the Anarchs. In it the last twinges of his head disappeared and poise returned to his nerves.

His desk in the Copy Department was heaped with memoranda. One with the indecipherable but familiar initialling of the chief directed him to prepare a series of messages to be issued to the salesmen of the Shewantsa Company in book form. It must have a gripping title.

"Enthusiasm," said the memorandum, "is the watchword. Can move mountains. Electric current of enthusiasm moving force in any campaign. Remember, this is a matter of pure Personality-Punch. Every word you write must vimmel with it." The last sentence was picked out in red. Also the words "Enthusiasm," "Electric," "Personality," and "Vimmel."

" 'Enthusiasmograms,' " Gail thought suddenly. "That's what we'll call it. That grips!"

So violent was the convulsion into which, in the manner of great minds transferring their thought to paper or to action, Gail was thrown—so violent and so time-destroying that when, suddenly, Rideout's face appeared above him, he was aware of no lapse. In that coming back to full consciousness the vision of Rideout's face that yesterday had flashed upon him was again conjured in his mind, so that for an instant there was doubt as to which was real and which was memory; then they merged.

Rideout, standing before him now, was pale but perfectly poised.

"Lunch, Winnie?" he said.

"Lunch!" said Gail, looking at his watch. "Why, so it is!"

"Did you expect time was going to stop till you got through? What is it, by the way, personality?"

"Enthusiasmograms," said Gail.

Something very like a grunt came from Rideout; Gail looked up at him sharply. There was a curious expression about his mouth. He had the look of one whose impulse was to smile but who had lost the habitude.

“Let’s go to a real place to-day,” he said, when they had got into the street. “Expensive and quiet.” Gail, the Georgian house and a dozen cars flashing suddenly before his mind, agreed with restrained heartiness. Then, through that sense which returned to him, now and then, in the lapses of the Game, he perceived that there was something not usual in Rideout’s manner. There had been a touch of desperate bravado in the way he had said “quiet and expensive.” He walked now with his eyes on the ground and his arms swinging loose and something of swagger in his step; he had a little of the manner of a man who has played long at gaming-tables and lost but is on his way back to throw in his last dollar with the certainty of losing that too; in short, he displayed the curious working of a human mechanism driven beyond its endurance, yet still trying to compensate.

When, at Pierre’s, they had sat down and given their orders to the fussing waiters, Rideout looked up suddenly and said:

“I’m done.”

“Good God!” said Gail.

“Yes, done—fired.”

There was a long silence. Wayward thoughts ran through Gail’s mind; the first of them were of the kind that run, at times, like wantons through every human mind and do no credit to the race. It is a little comfort to think we cannot help the dance of these houris; that their movement is, after all, mechanical along grooves carved by society and circumstance in our brains, and takes place in moments of the will’s relaxing.

So, first, unhappily, Gail’s thoughts were of himself. He had survived this cut that eliminated Rideout. He would continue his certain march to power and cars and Georgian houses. Flickering thoughts like the ghostly flicker of little blue flames.

But looking up in the midst of them the whole soul of him of a sudden changed. Looking up he saw the bravado gone entirely from Rideout’s face, and the boy look—almost a child look—come into it. His eyes were confused, as if a fog was before them, and his lower lip hung uncertainly. At the sight of his pain Gail lowered his eyes, ashamed at the trick of his mind turning in on himself.

But in another instant Rideout had gained control.

“Survival of the fittest,” he said, with the suggestion of a sneer.

“It’s all right, of course. Some are fit and some unfit. I’m glad I’ve found it in time. I wanted to tell you, Winnie. I wanted to tell you I didn’t care. I don’t care a damn.”

There was a struggle in his face between the boy and life. The boy cared. Youth revolted at this casting out upon the ash-heap, as it were, of the hope and the ambition that had been its food. It was an old struggle between the boy and life. And life here was strong and youth a little starved. So life won.

"Don't let go," said Gail suddenly, seeing in his face the boy's defeat.

Rideout laughed, not quite mirthlessly. There was an element in his laugh that startled Gail a little; it was like a laugh that he himself might have laughed some time since.

"Dramatic stuff," Rideout said. " 'Don't let go.' I used to put things like that in my sensational stories at awful climaxes, and laugh at myself for doing it. I'm not laughing at you, Winnie, don't think that. I like you and I respect you, and there's something about your face that makes me want to spill a lot of stuff to you I never would spill to anybody else—not in this game, anyway. First day I saw you I felt that way, but then I was up to my neck in all this bunk enthusiasm—and instead of respecting your cynical attitude, I tried to talk you out of it. You see, I'd got the habit of trying to talk myself out of it, and when I talked to other people I was talking partly to them and partly to myself.

"I'm glad you said 'Don't let go!' just that way. It struck me as funny. It's the first thing that has struck me as funny since I hit this business. So I guess there's some hope for me—I used to think damn near everything was more or less funny. But there isn't anything funny about this game when you're in it. It must be side-splitting to those on the outside."

There was a long silence. Thoughts made their way with difficulty through Gail's mind. They were old thoughts; thoughts of the time before the turning; and since, it seemed a multitude of stumbling-blocks had been dropped here and there in his brain over which such thinking now moved with labor.

Rideout broke the silence, saying:

"I guess I'm an introspective guy."

But Gail was so busy at the moment in self-analysis that he hardly heard the interpolation, and Rideout, no doubt, took his silence as a silence of sympathy, which, indeed, it was.

Gail remembered an absurd prayer he had once uttered that he might be permitted to regard life primarily as a comedy. But it was not a comedy. It was a profoundly serious affair, really a tragic affair. Here was Rideout lightly at the moment referring to the return of his humor, but still the practical hard way of life stretched dismally before him. What would he do? He thought of the girl at home and the boy they had wondered about having.

"What will you do?" he said.

"Do?" said Rideout vaguely, as if speaking from a long distance through a fog. He came back slowly. "Do? I'll steer clear of this stuff as long as I can live, and try writing again. And if that doesn't work—if that doesn't work —" the sudden despair came flooding into his face—the despair of youth. But it was there an instant only; again he smiled, and all the lower part of his face grew, in the moment, older.

"I won't let go," he said, still smiling. "But let me tell you, Winnie," he went on after a slight pause, "control your swallowing mechanism. Play with this enthusiasm stuff if you want to, but don't swallow it. Play with it, get rich on it, but never swallow it. Keep laughing at it. I swallowed too much of it, and it's damn near paralyzed my laughing faculty. It does, you know. I know you think I'm only a kid, but sometimes a kid outgrows his years and learns more than is good for him. I've drunk a lot of this dope and, believe me, it's habit-forming. I got to be an addict very young, and those are the hardest ones to cure. Enthusiasm! Cocaine—that's all that is, the way you get it at Outwater's. When you get out and your reason comes back to you, it's easy to see that the only real enthusiasm is what comes from inside. You can't put it there—except by cocaine. Men like Outwater carry the needle around with 'em and jab it into innocent boys like you and me, and the first thing you know we're ranting around the way I did to you that first day we had lunch, about dropping pebbles in the pond. Why I'd talked that stuff to dozens of people before I sprung it on you—and you smiled—not having got your full dose yet—you smiled, and instead of letting you smile your good healthy smile, I tried to talk you out of it with enthusiasm and personality!"

"But," Gail said, "how can you do anything without enthusiasm?" He thought, waveringly, of his enthusiasmograms of the morning, and half resented this slur on his sincerity.

"Of course," said Rideout. "But from the inside. How enthusiastic are you, inside yourself, about Vitapore? Freshening as the west wind? I saw your layout. It's grand. It's just the stuff old Bee eats alive. Now I'll tell you how he gets it.

"He gets hold of a young fellow and takes him into his office, and opens up his hypo and pulls down a bottle marked 'Enthusiasm—Lotion,' jabs in the needle and waits—what happens? The stuff gets into the boy's young blood, and the first thing you know his intelligence and everything else combine together to pour out copy. Now here's the crux. The boy has to have intelligence or his copy is pure raving.

“Then, by and by the boy grows old, or immune, or something, and the dope doesn’t work. Out he goes, unfit for anything else. Thank God, I got out in time . . . at least I think I did.”

Gail was uneasily silent, in the manner of persons who have just heard something they prefer not to believe.

“But some people succeed. Some people don’t go out.”

Rideout smiled.

“You’re one of them, Winnie. You’ve got a great mind, Winnie. An original—a grand mind. People like that are gems too precious for these Princes of Bunk to let drop. You’ve got a whale of a capacity for thinking new thinks all the time, and that capacity works up a little real enthusiasm of your own to help out the cocaine. I think you’ll be a success, in the Game. But, mind you, you’ll lose your soul. No man can eat, drink, and breathe lies, circulate poisons of false enthusiasms in his blood, lose his focus to such extent that a shaving-cream looks as beautiful to him as a Correggio Madonna and preserve either his soul or his humor.”

Gail within himself conceded this to be entirely true, and resolved hereafter to laugh at the game. He would be big enough to play it and laugh at it at the same time. He laughed now and felt immensely relieved.

“I’m young to do all this talking,” Rideout went on. “I guess you think I’m a damn fool. But I remember something of Kipling’s that sort of clings to me. It was about an American:

> “ ‘But, through the shift of mood and mood,
> Mine ancient humor saves him whole—
> The cynic devil in his blood
> That bids him mock his hurrying soul. . . .’ ”

“ ‘Mine ancient humor saves him whole.’ Some day, maybe, when you get as low as you can get, something will break through and strike you as funny. You’ll get low enough—wait and see. Even if you stick. Sensitive people like you and me, who were intended to think real thoughts, do, after a while, in this game. The enthusiasm out of the bottle won’t enthuse any more.

“Then, if something breaks through and makes you laugh—well, then perhaps you’ll be fired; for you can’t laugh out loud there. But, then, you won’t give a damn, maybe. I don’t know.”

He stopped, and there was a long silence, and the glow of interest which had kept him up in this monologue faded, and he looked old and tired.

“I can talk like this to you,” he said at last. “But what shall I tell her?” His face worked pitifully a moment, then he covered it awkwardly with his large hands. “Oh, God!” he said.

The sunlight was gone from the office when Gail went back to it. He found on his desk another parchment, rolled and ribboned. The sight of it sickened him. His scrawlings of the morning—since arranged by the office boy into a neat pile—sickened him, too, but, being his own, were a little less loathsome; and, having nothing else at the moment but his ugly thoughts to occupy him, he took up the sheets and read them.

ELECTRICITY AND SALESMANSHIP

Thus, in bold lettering, the scrawl was headed.

Have you ever stopped to consider when the room springs sudden alight from the glowing of a dozen filaments, how subtle a force is flowing through them?

Have you pondered the elusive mystery of a power of whose essential nature the magicians who have tamed it to their will know nothing? A power derived from the fall of water, the turn of a wheel, invisible, yet a mover of mountains; without a sound, yet bearing in its flight the faintest whisper across the infinite wildernesses of space and time!

Such ponderings are dreams and not for the practical man of the workaday world. But the harnessing of this force, the control of it, the direction of it to its thousand and one daily uses, these are practical problems indeed.

“Why thousand and one?” thought Gail.

Consider the electric light circuit in which a dozen, a hundred, a thousand filaments spring into white heat at the touch of a single button.

Have you ever watched an electrician at work on such a circuit? Have you noticed the care with which he makes each connection? Why? Because the failure of a single connection throws out the entire circuit. When the mysterious electric force is introduced it must flow uninterrupted from the beginning back to the beginning, and on again endlessly, till the chain is broken.

Gail stopped with a vague uneasiness. “I wonder if that is so,” he said.

Consider the intimate analogy between this circuit and large-scale salesmanship. Here the individual lights are the individual salesmen, the circuit is the vast system

organized at the central sales office, and the mysterious force that brings the flow of light, enthusiasm. This imponderable force, of which no man can discover the true nature or origin, flows uninterrupted through the entire circuit, and each individual salesman carries the light and the warmth of it into the dark, forgotten corners of the world. Jar loose a single connection, and the whole is useless. Let one individual get out of tune with the system and every other is instantly incapacitated.

Consider now the short circuit. When the force of electricity, the "juice," as we call it in the vernacular, is allowed to move directly from one point of the circuit to another without following the path of the system laid out for it a fuse is blown and the whole area of the circuit is plunged in darkness. So, too, in the circuit of salesmanship, the force of enthusiasm may become a dangerous one. An individual worker attempting to pervert it to his own advantage; trying to beat the system—to dodge the carefully planned order of its movement, may burn out himself and a hundred others, and damage a great organization, the fruit of years of patient labor.

There are three rules of salesmanship, then, to be derived from the allegory of the electric circuit:

1. Keep your connections tight and clean that the dynamic force of enthusiasm may flow in an unbroken stream.

2. Work together, with every salesman perfectly in tune with every other, and all under control of the central sales office.

3. Don't try to jump the system, to experiment, to the disadvantage of your fellow workers, because enthusiasm out of control becomes instantly a DEstructive instead of a CONstructive force.

Gail finished his reading with a sense of nausea. It was incredible to him, now, in his transfigured mood, that so monstrous a thing could have wriggled out of his brain. "A great mind," Rideout had said. So that was the product of a great mind. Was it conceivable that minds existed in this scheme of selling, which, in his pompous buffoonery, he had so inflated, sufficiently inferior to receive and respond to such muling and puking as disgraced the clean and innocent paper before him? Bah!

He gathered the sheets together and proceeded to tear the pile across. In the midst of this contemptuous act, however, the hand of Fate was laid upon his shoulder, and he looked up suddenly into two gray eyes.

With the paper half torn he rose awkwardly to his feet. The chin of Mr. Outwater thrust forward at him threateningly.

"Never destroy," said the chief. "Never destroy in anger. Come."

He took the half-torn sheets from Gail's hands, turned about, and walked with his irresistible swing down the vista of the desks. Gail followed him

into the mahogany shrine, and sat, remote from the desk. Mr. Outwater sat down, read over the sheets rapidly; then, without looking up, extended his finger, and poised it perpendicularly over the chair next him.

Gail got up automatically and sat down in the indicated chair. He gripped himself firmly. Now was the time to speak. He was strong now in anger, in devastating contempt for the whole of this miserable tomfoolery. He would make the break, now, once for all, throw off the chains of this spell, be free forever of hypocrisy, false sentiment, and all the rest of the petty rigmarole. He would hurl this damnable Rideout affair at the chief's head, and walk out of the fetid air of his temple into the freshness of freedom. A magnificent thought! Gail Winbourne, idealist, the man without a price, spitting upon the high priesthood of the Great Golden God of Bunk!

"Sir!" he said.

But a large hand was raised gently, and he stopped.

"One moment, my boy. I have just read your work, which you hold in such high contempt. Such contempt is a wholesome sign, mind you. But never destroy until you are sure. Some of your lightest work may have elements of great value. Now, this little talk on salesmanship. Crude, of course. Needs lightening. Needs jazzing up. Do you know what 'jazzing up' means? Of course. You are of the jazz age. Take it back. Copy it. Look up your electricity. I feel technical weaknesses. Mind you, I know little of such things, but I have my instinct. My instinct says 'look up your electricity.' There—you've got an idea—why did you want to tear it up?"

"Because," said Gail, "it is childish stuff."

"One moment, my boy. Remember, the psychologists tell us that our minds are of different ages. Some minds never develop beyond eight, ten, fifteen years. Remember this," he paused, a long index-finger poised in the air. Then, pointing each word with a jab of his finger at Gail, he went on: "Remember this: *One of the most valuable assets in this profession is the ability to write for twelve-year-old minds*."

There was an impressive silence. Thought whirled through Gail's brain. There was still time to speak. Yet after the chief's last remark, Gail's speech about throwing off the shackles seemed a little out of order. After all, if one could write, consciously, for the twelve-year-old mind, it meant that one's own mind must be far beyond that point. Doubtless this very ability to adjust one's creation to a variety of minds implied a detachable quality of one's own, a capacity for magnificent aloofness.

Yet the impulse to speak was strong. Mr. Outwater was relaxed now, receptive.

“I had begun to think,” said Gail, stating not precisely what, in fact, he had begun to think, “that I was not suited for this work.”

This sounded a little wavering, and the chief was still receptive. Gail straightened up in his chair.

“I had begun to think I might have done better to stick to my writing. I was getting a real start in writing. There is a freedom about it that is better adapted to my—to my temperament.”

It was not a strong presentation. The chief sat silent a moment, then the hint of a smile came over his face.

“And your wife?” he said. “And, er—and the children? Is there a freedom about it that is better suited to their temperaments? In short,” he turned abruptly to Gail, with his face tightened, “in short, leaving this pleasant but somewhat vague element of temperament out of it, can they live on your writing?”

“I believe so,” said Gail, remembering, however, his conversation with Muriel in the remote dawn of that long day.

There was a silence so long and so relaxed that, it seemed to Gail, the chief had lost in it the whole of his majestic quickening, and become, indeed, a dreamer mastered of his dreams.

And Gail, his eyes wandering out over the city, projected his thought beyond it into a green and misty valley. So absorbed he became in this pleasant contemplation that only in the edge of his consciousness was he aware of the opening and shutting of a drawer in the chief’s desk.

This act, nevertheless, brought him back, and he found a sheet, exquisite in colors, thrust into his hand. So in tune with his thought was the picture here displayed that, for a moment, the coincidence failed to startle him. There was the valley, yellow-green with sunlight, and a long white road winding off and up a hill in the far distance, whereon stood a low Georgian house. In the foreground, where the road came to one’s very feet, stood a low-hung racy car, sketched in with impressionistic strokes and color blending happily with the landscape. It was a thrilling picture.

Mr. Outwater left Gail a moment rapt with the thrill of it, and then interpolated a remark in the interstices of his thought.

“How would you like a car like that?”

Gail did not speak. There had come a sudden association with the love of the morning.

Mr. Outwater got up and, pointing with a right-angle motion of his finger, walked out of the office. Gail mechanically, as always, followed him.

He led the way down a long unfamiliar corridor of doors, opened one at the end. It opened into an office, a small replica of the chief's. Out the window was the city, and beyond the city the sun prepared for its departure below the western sky-line.

"This is yours," said Mr. Outwater, then turning suddenly he left Gail alone.

Perhaps in our untangling of the strings actuating the human marionette in his little gyrations upon the stage of life, we overestimate the instinct of possession. Perhaps we err in ascribing to it universality. Perhaps there are some, many, who enter utterly without it; others from whom the string has broken off; others, again, to whom it has been new-attached. Apparently the nomads, the gypsies, and various followers of the road, vagabonds, certain artists, players, musicians have it not, or are unconscious of it; and many a pretender eschews it publicly.

Of those eschewing it, sincerely enough, no doubt, was Gail. Things he had owned had meant little to him, bored him, cumbered him. Yet how can we, truthful recorder, deny a thrill that warmed the heart and sent pleasing shivers adown the backbone of him, here now in this office, so true a miniature of the shrine itself. "This is yours!"

On the desk, clear else, lay a rolled and ribboned parchment. Having nothing other to do, and a little embarrassed by the unfamiliar presence of his new possession, he closed the door and read the parchment. It was headed in black, underscored with red.

TOGETHERNESS

Thus was the English language adjusted to meet the needs of Mr. Outwater's "intramural solidarity campaign." The bulletin went on with much epigram to expose the subtler values of this co-operative quality:

> And to be successful in my ventures great and small, I, too, must feel this togetherness; I must feel the need of you as you must feel the need of me.
>
> And I do feel it [the document concluded]. I feel the subtlest wave of your sympathy, the faintest current of your antipathy; the strength of your togetherness, the weakness of your apartness, in everything we do.
>
> So be it. And remember ever that great together-working trio, Unity, Enthusiasm, Friendship.

Gail stood a moment at the west window, but before his gaze the city and the twilight faded, and Rideout's face hung quivering.

He turned and threw the parchment in his new basket, and made his way out of the office and into the street.

“Pleasant food for the twelve-year-old mind,” he said, with a little smile that busy passers-by looked up at an instant in wonder.

But as he walked Gail forgot the twelve-year-old mind in his busy searching among the types of cars that whirled up and down and about the congested street. . . .

XV

AND so Gail became a power in the world of industry. He came into complete control of the vast Shewantsa propaganda, and Nature's Drink for Tired Skins was the vitalizing force of his life. From him radiated the myriad waves of consumer appeal; in him generated the dynamic force of enthusiasm that sped round the wires of Mr. Olfleisch's sales system, quickened his salesmen, illumined them, that they might give light to thousands of floundering buyers hitherto in unhappy darkness. And to thousands of men, everywhere, he brought relief in their intervals of fatigue; their faces were no longer sagged, and the mirror showed smoothed-out lines and the true glow of health suffusing sallow cheeks. A profound, mysterious force, galvanizing the centres of the universe; startling the outposts of civilization; spreading, propagating, livening, juvenating, fructifying; and piling rich red gold before the ravenous god in the temple.

And notwithstanding it all, the earth, stubborn and indifferent orb, travelled its daily miles upon its orbit and the rays of the sun came upon it with more directness, and new peace-plans were presented in the capital, and spring arrived.

It was a merry spring, this of the year 1921, with the last world's convulsion simmering and the next not yet at the boil, and so many young people in this interval so insistent upon their gaiety; yet somehow with all its lightness, its headlong fun, its freshness, its sweetness of birth, its innocence of new green, it passed Gail by.

Not that the capacity was gone from him of quickening at the spectacle of rebirth, nor, indeed, that the subtler emotions traditionally kindled in the young and sensitive by this pleasing season were dead and cold within him; such sudden transformations are not usual in the human—rather, perhaps, that he was too busy. After all, so intensive an activity as was, of a sudden, his, leaves little space for lingering emotions or glimpses of infinity. And, too, he was in a sense making his own spring. He was himself resprung in power; he was being fertilized to greatness. And he was giving. He was giving messages of youth and health to a presumably wearied world.

The world, in this instance, was undoubtedly wearied. If, however, it had not happened to be in that receptive condition it would be simple enough to make it so. One merely stated on one's copy that the world was tired, and so

it instantly became. “You, too, are weary.” You may not be so at the moment of reading, but we defy you to read that line and then deny it. “You, too, need health and strength in your daily task.” “You, too, feel the nagging pains of fatigue.” And then, oh, immeasurably satisfying climax: “You, too, can discover the fountain of eternal youth!”

So Gail was making spring.

One day he attended a luncheon to advertising men. President of the association was the man who had put Golden Soap on the map.

“Brothers,” said the president, “I want to tell you at this climax of our campaign of cleanness, what your profession stands for to-day. You know that it stands for efficiency. You know that it stands for dignity. But it stands for more than that. It stands for Truth. From the propaganda for which we, of this association, are sponsors, the Lie has been eliminated. That is what the Campaign of Cleanness, waged over the past five years, has brought about to-day. There is no statement made in any piece of copy prepared by any single member of this association which is not strictly, consistently, logically true.

“I believe, gentlemen, that we should regard this deep, moving force which has made us what we are, in a religious light. I believe, in a sense, we should worship this force. I think, if we thoroughly understood what it has meant to the world, what it means to the future, to posterity, we could not but feel that divinity in our meditations. The force of making a light to shine, brothers, that’s what it is.

“Let us think of the force of advertising in a larger sense. For it is, after all, the same dominating force that is set moving in the dissemination of all news, of all propaganda. Think what it has meant in the war. Think how it roused the nations to arms. Could we have fought the way we did, brothers, swept over the top to victory, to conquest, giving our millions, defying all hardships, but for this force lighting our way, flashing before us the reasons for our fighting, so that our eyes could not turn this way nor that without seeing the burning truth staring at us from newspapers, from bill-boards, from posters, nay, even from flaming electric signs, so symbolic of that light of truth; the truth about atrocities, the truth about suffering, the truth about famine, the truth about all the grim realities of war?

“But we must not dwell on war. We are peace-loving people, brothers. And our achievements in peace are no less. Let us take a single example of the educational results of this force. Fifty years ago the people of this great nation knew almost nothing about the care of the teeth. Their teeth were unsightly, a cause of shame. To-day, four out of five—” he paused an instant

and looked down—"I have forgotten the figures, gentlemen; but to-day nearly every man, woman, and child understands the care of the teeth. Is this true of other nations? I answer, it is not. Is this because we have a better practice of dentistry here? This, I believe, is true; but again I answer, this is not the reason. The reason, my brothers, is that we, in America, have become—and I think you will not misunderstand me—tooth-paste conscious. And why have we become tooth-paste conscious, gentlemen? Because through every street-car, through every newspaper, through every magazine—in short, through every medium of publicity throughout this broad land—this great divine force has given us of its light in our daily bodily needs.

"There is a noble university, gentlemen, which I need not remind you is located in New Haven, which has for its motto three Latin words: 'Lux et Veritas.' I need not tell you educated and cultivated gentlemen that this motto, translated, reads: 'The Light of Truth.' I think we would do well, brothers, to adopt this motto in our profession. It is truly symbolic of our great work—symbolic of that divine force, profound, forward-moving, that will make of this world in the time to come a cleaner, happier, more vigorous, more virile, more beautiful place to live in."

There were tears in his eyes when he had finished. There were tears in the eyes of his listeners. It seemed almost sacrilege to applaud. An instant silence hung. Then emotion burst its flood-gates, men cheered, slapped each other's shoulders, pounded on the floor.

About Gail in the general buzz were heard the words: "real inspiration," "genius," "sound principles," "clean-cut," "sense of values," "in the last analysis truth wins," "honesty is the best policy."

The luncheon, from the cocktails in the private room to the cigarette-filled coffee-cups, had lasted three hours. Gail had been gripped by the hand a hundred times, introduced as the man who had put this and that upon the map, as a rising young this-and-that, as a success at twenty-four—or was it twenty-three?—his pride and his modesty and his hand had been mauled and stretched and lamed.

But it had been invigorating. As he walked back to the office, with difficulty keeping pace with the long stride of the president, B. Minturn Outwater, he could not restrain waves of exquisite chill down his spine as his chief nodded to right and left.

On one of the corners Mr. Outwater pointed to two signs on opposite sides of the street.

"Ours now," he said. "Both National Tobacco ads. Swift did the copy."

Gail looked proudly at the products of his company. One displayed:

ALL MEN ARE LIARS

some one has said. You may not trust your neighbor, but you cannot doubt figures.

Statistics have shown that five out of six discriminating smokers prefer the straight plug to any mixture.

GREAT DANE PLUG
THE UNMIXED VIRGINIA TOBACCO

The other:

THE LAST ANALYSIS

of sales figures shows that the majority of tobacco enthusiasts favor the subtly blended preparations.

TRANQUILLITY MIXTURE

When they reached the office Gail rang his bell and asked the boy to bring him the latest "Vitapore" statistics from the Statistical Department. The boy re-entered and placed a memorandum face down on the desk, indicating his appreciation of its confidential nature.

CONFIDENTIAL was printed across the top of the memorandum. Below, it appeared that 5,000 select young men had been sent a questionnaire on a return post-card, asking which lotion was preferred. He scanned the number of replies and sighed. He drew from his desk drawer a tentative layout.

ONE IN FIVE

Are you the lucky one? One in every five young men has learned already the vitalizing properties of VITAPORE. Have you four friends who do not know?

He inserted the word discriminating before "young men," looked back at the confidential memorandum and back again at the layout. He shook his head, and put back the luring sheet.

"Not yet," he said. "The standard of truth cannot be lowered in this office."

Gail was learning rapidly. He was becoming possessed of vast stores of information. He was understanding physiology. He knew why people perspired. He knew what happened to beards when shaving-soap was applied. He knew about the microbes that attacked one's throat. He knew what happened to one's nervous system when one walked; what happened to certain glands when one chewed; how to obtain health without habit-forming or debilitating drugs.

He knew, too, what paint did to wood and iron. He knew, though he had never worn it, what silk felt like next the body. He knew, though his own had rarely done so, how memory functioned. He knew devices by which, in five minutes, one could learn a list of a hundred words. He knew how to become charming or erudite or a good talker in one's spare time.

But his knowledge was broader than all this. He learned about certain intangible things: abstract virtues, ideals. He learned, for instance, what "service" meant. How much it did really mean, that word! The indeterminate value, the little added touch that made of a commodity something more than a mere commodity! He learned what "morale" meant—a deep, mysterious force, this—subtle! He learned what "good-will" meant. One advertised not merely to sell one's product. Far from it! This, in fact, became almost incidental, one hardly mentioned it. It was, to be sure, nothing, considered by the side of this thrilling thing, "good-will." One "disseminated" it. Through Good-Will people became conscious of one's honor and integrity. How much grander this than selling! When people became conscious of one's honor and integrity they bought, of course, one's goods. That was the material end of it. One could not dispense entirely with the material end, in this inevitable dualism, but one *stressed* the spiritual. That was why advertising was such an uplifting career. In no other profession, except perhaps the church, could one so stress the spiritual.

One day he met Arkway. Arkway said:

"How is the great god?"

"The great god?"

"The great god Bunk."

"Oh," said Gail.

"Good lord, man, you're not really falling for this stuff, are you?"

"This stuff," said Gail by way of marking time. But he went on directly. "It's my business, and it's a perfectly good business."

"Excellent," said Arkway. "But your attitude toward it?"

“Obviously,” said Gail, ignoring the last question, “advertising is necessary. The manufacturer must get his products before the consumer. Nowadays, when trade is so complicated and competition so keen, it can only be done by suggestion. And the man who can rouse the most interest in his product and leave the most vivid impression on the prospective consumer’s mind, is the man that wins.”

“True, true,” said Arkway, with some irritation. “That’s all right if you yourself accept it as the bunk that it is, and admit you are bamboozling the buyer into buying what may be good for him. But if you get the idea that you are doing something great, or that you are an idealist, or that you are educating anybody, or, for that matter, that the extravaganza with which you deface the innocent landscape is true, then you’re lost. Many do and are.”

“But it is true,” said Gail. “Modern advertising is true.”

“Taken letter for letter, sometimes. But the impression? That your unattractive failure can make himself a social and business success by a few weeks’ study of little red pamphlets that come to him through the mail? That soap—plain ordinary soap made out of plain ordinary fat—is ‘food’ for your skin? That people get nervous prostration because their heels hit the ground? That pains in the back invariably mean kidney trouble? That dependence on drastic drugs actually improves the health? That certain applications will grow or permanently remove hair? That a correspondence school can teach a man to write or draw who has no gift for writing or drawing? That tobacco is improved by cooking?

“But that isn’t what I’m worrying about. I’m worrying about you. Your sense of relativity. Here, look at this.” He drew a newspaper from his pocket and turned it over to a large advertisement covering the back page.

THE LIFE PURPOSE

A man is judged by the purpose he has and the purpose he achieves.

George Washington’s purpose was the breaking of the bonds of tyranny and the founding of a free nation.

Abraham Lincoln’s purpose was the breaking of the bonds of slavery and the preservation of a Union of Free States.

These men accomplished their purposes and their accomplishment brought happiness to millions of people.

Many another lesser known has accomplished the purpose of bringing contentment. Shall we say that such a man is less great because of the humbler path of his life?

> The life purpose of Solomon I. Rosenbloom has been to bring happiness to millions of men by putting into their hands a shaving-brush of permanent bristles. These millions he has spared the beginnings of that irritation which, grown to greater proportions, has broken nerves and broken homes.
>
> And he, too, has accomplished his purpose. His brush is to-day within your reach—a true comfort, a happiness-breeder, a creator of harmony in your home.

Arkway put back the paper and went on before Gail could speak.

"Thus has Mr. Rosenbloom attained a par with the leaders of history. He didn't know it until this copy writer proclaimed it. Now Mr. Rosenbloom's purpose in producing this brush was, obviously, to make money. The copy writer's purpose was, no doubt, similar. But here is the point: before the copy writer produced this masterpiece he had worked himself up into believing that it was true. And after a few such pieces of copy he probably believed himself a great man. And he carried his attitude about with him, and it got mixed up in other things—his family, perhaps—and he was shortly moving about on an exalted plane, and a shaving-brush became the great, glorious, shining ideal of his life. Nice, useful things, shaving-brushes—especially ones with static bristles—on the bathroom shelf. Along with your soap. But I am getting so I expect the sun to stay down some morning, and a cake of Golden Soap to rise in its place."

Gail smiled not without difficulty. He felt a little personal injury.

"But don't you think these people do a service besides making money?"

Gail was making his defense in the somewhat unenthusiastic manner of persons not convinced of the truth of their argument.

"Anybody who makes anything does a service. But there have always been shaving-brushes. Fifty years ago there were shaving-brushes whose bristles stayed in. But they weren't thrust down the throat of every man, woman, and child in the country. And there were just as many bought in proportion to the population."

"Ah," said Gail, seizing upon this happy point. "In proportion to the population. That's where the rub comes. It is the increase in population that has made every problem more complex."

"Rather the increase in competition here," said Arkway quietly. "And while the competition was between shaving-brushes, everything was all right. But after a while they forgot about their brushes and began a competition in advertising. That was where the agent came in. He didn't care a rap about shaving-brushes; all he cared about was bigger, better, and buncomber copy; he wanted to drive out the competitor, not by making

better brushes, but by spending more money on advertising than the competitor could afford. Of course, the money went in his pocket. And the manufacturer never knew that a game was being played on him.

"You see, beyond a certain point, more advertising doesn't sell more commodities in the same proportionate increase; after a certain point you increase your advertising merely because the other man increases his; merely because it is necessary to keep what you've got. And oftentimes you increase your advertising merely because the agent persuades you that it is necessary. It's the agency that makes all the trouble, because here you have an outsider who is interested in making money for himself. If every manufacturer made his own campaigns and wrote his own copy, there would be far less advertising done and just as much stuff sold.

"Now I believe that advertising, as it stands, could be enormously reduced if everybody would agree to the reduction. It has passed the saturation point. Much of it is pure waste for everybody except the agent and the medium. And thus you would reduce a highly demoralizing aspect of this already too complicated civilization."

Gail jumped at the pause.

"Assuming this to be true," there was a satisfaction in this tolerant "assuming," "how are you going about it?"

"Tax it," said Arkway.

There was a feeling of breakage somewhere in Gail at this wholly unexpected retort.

"Tax it?"

"Certainly. Good revenue for the government. Cut out some of these damnable signs, especially in the country. Put an extra high tax on those."

"But that wouldn't be fair," said Gail, not observing the slight smile that had come on Arkway's face; "to tax cheap advertising higher."

"Most taxes are not fair," said Arkway. "But it would do away with an intolerable menace to the aesthetic sense of new generations. Fairness be damned! There's no fairness due a man who defiles what of the world is still innocent and beautiful with deodorants and kidney pills. It's indecent. It's obscene, blatantly vulgarly obscene. There are certain things we forbid in public places because they offend our modesty. We call them, politely, nuisances. I consider them delicate in comparison with the signs one sees along the railroad tracks and on the highways. They excite and encourage all the vile physical thought to which, at best, we are far too prone in this age of bodies."

“Well,” said Gail, with a feeling of impotence, “you can’t make laws on that basis.”

“True,” said Arkway, sighing as he settled into his old comfortable sense that the world, to be sure, is the worst world possible. “I don’t expect any improving and unprofitable laws in this rich and complacent democracy. But I should like to be allowed to go a day without thinking of my bowels.”

Gail laughed, a little relieved that there was something to laugh at.

There was a long silence as they were pushed along by the hurrying of the street. Then they turned off to a side street where it was suddenly quiet.

“Why, I didn’t mean to come all this way,” said Arkway, waking out of unhappy depths of thought. They stopped.

“Gail!” said Arkway, and Gail looked up at him and into troubled eyes. “I believe in you, Gail, and I hope you won’t get entirely lost to the world where you belong. You are an enormously promising person, and there is a long, powerful tentacle twisting itself about you.”

Gail said nothing because old emotions were tugging at him.

“Good-by.” Arkway held out his hand and went.

For Gail after that there were three miserable days. All the words of Arkway marched in long succession through his mind, and then, without a break, marched through it again, like a stage army, and again; he tried to interpolate arguments of his own, new arguments to stop them, but the words of Arkway ignored them and marched steadily on, and back behind the scenes and round again before him. They did not even trip over the obstacles he threw before their feet. And at night he dreamed of tentacles dripping venom, twisting in and out among the trees of a dim forest, wriggling after him as he ran and ran.

But the three days went and the woods and the dreams came at last to an end, and his busy life closed in on him.

Warm days came and spring hats bloomed, and the mayor came back from the South where he had spent several weeks in the pleasing occupations of swimming, condemning the interests, and pitying the poor of New York; and people began to think about subletting their pigeon-holes for the summer.

When April came, warm and wet and full of new smells, business along with the buds and birds increased, and Gail had no time at all for thinking. When five o’clock came and the stenographers bustled and giggled about their hats, Gail stayed on. He stayed on till seven o’clock, dropped in the

lonely elevator to the street floor, got himself food and carried it to an enamel-topped table, ate it with great rapidity, and rose again in the elevator. It was quiet through the long evenings sitting by himself in his office, shuffling, dealing, and playing solitaire with vast industries. So fascinating was the game, so deeply absorbing, that time loosed from him its manacles and he floated, pure spirit, out of all bounding dimensions. Once he looked up suddenly in his trance and seemed to see the walls coming toward him from an immense distance, moving slowly through endless minutes, before, with a sort of click they slid into place and his mind clicked back again into his skull.

Thus through April and through May. And what of home? Muriel was not a great reader; reading was no resource, no relaxing, but an effort. About the house there was sewing to be done, things to be arranged and arranged, but these things are not a fascinating or absorbing game. So Muriel, at home in long evenings, engaged in that exercise known as "brooding."

Now, there are two kinds of minds in the world: those which can brood with profit, and those which cannot. There are those who can think and speculate about the essence of being and the projection of life into eternity, and the mysteries of the whence, and all the whys presented by the incongruities of life; shall we say these are profitable brooders, since, though "getting nowhere," they derive therefrom a pleasure and delight that seasons sharply define their lives? And there are those whose brooding consists in revolving and revolving an intensely personal thought. It occurs to us that women belong to the latter classification, though perhaps this belief is imposed upon us by convention.

But we know that Muriel was such, and we know the form of her brooding in those silent, long-drawn hours that had no existence for Gail. And we know that in that April and that long May, when buds and business grew upon the earth that she, too, was occupied beyond all sense of spring with the repeated revolving of a thought.

The thought was always the same, but in its form it changed. First it was: "Gail is working to-night; I mustn't mind; he is working for me, making money and power for *us*. Dear Gail." Then it was: "Gail is away to-night. How slow the time goes! Gail is away to-night. But he is working." Then it was: "Gail is away from me to-night. He is away from me. Why must he work so hard?" Then: "Why does he stay away night after night. He is working. Does he love his work more than he loves me?"

Here, however, she reached an impasse. It was incredible that a man should love his work more than his wife. It was incredible that a man should love anything more than his wife. Except—except——

A woman is so constituted (or perhaps so environed) that after a certain continuance of brooding her thoughts turn in upon the subject of sex. It appears to be the *cul-de-sac* in which all the tortuous ways of thinking join and end. Thus a thought such as this which gyrated until it assumed a multitude of misshapen forms, acquired after a time the semblance of suspicion.

Muriel went often to bed before Gail came; sometimes when he made his way quietly into the "twin" bed beside her (a first substantial result of their growing affluence) she was asleep; oftener she was awake pretending sleep. This pretence had grown on her after one or two nights, when she had spoken to him, and he, dead with fatigue, had responded laconically and fallen almost immediately into deep sleep. It seemed hardly worth while to let him know that she was awake; there would be no caress in his words, and fatigue, most egoist of all sensations, forgets even love.

With this apparent waning of love the suspicion "no larger than a man's hand" (or heart?) grew and grew; assumed divers and unbeautiful shapes, for a woman's mind is either beautiful or hideous. One night it became a monster: an octopus, venomous and devouring.

Gail had worked late and the telephone had rung in his lonely office, making so startling a clangor in that sacred quiet that fear ran down and about his spine as if he had been surprised at an evil-doing. Outwater on the wire, a prospective client (women's underwear) at the *Café des Belles Lettres*, a private room, a bit of a party—nothing much; clients must be entertained. Business and pleasure seldom mingled, but—well—couldn't he drop around? His "line" would be pleasing; don't want clients to think we're all old fossils.

The private room was on the fifth floor; a policeman paraded the corridor outside and smiled at Gail. Within the private room was a private orchestra, black, producing that mournful and sinister wail of mimicked emotion and savage heart-beats that is known as jazz, women and men dancing, light filtering down through a multitude of hanging prisms, a long table pushed against the end of a wall covered with litter; coffee-cups overturned, broken, and oozing thick black liquid and sodden cigarette butts; glasses perceptibly drunk from, empty champagne bottles, napkins, their creases soiled from contact with the floor, all crowded together as if huddling in fear at the scene before them.

In a corner, his elbow resting in the saucer of a coffee-cup on a precarious edge of the table, sat B. Minturn Outwater, the highest of the high priests. All the erectness was gone from him, every muscle had relaxed, his shirt-front bulged, his incontinent stomach sagged as if weary even of

supporting his massive watch-chain. A cigar, extinct, protruded from his lip, sideways, pointing its dead and ragged end toward a woman who leaned toward him as if not quite certain of her balance. The woman was all neck and shoulders and back; a V descended to her waist in back, and revealed a quantity of skin and the inadequately covered knots of a spine.

Gail hesitated a moment; the door-knob slipped out of his hand and, caught in a sudden draft from the open windows, the door banged shut. The noise of it, even above the crash of the orchestra, penetrated to Mr. Outwater; he tightened suddenly and rose to his feet.

"Hail, Gail!" he shouted, and his uplifted hand brought the sound to a sudden stop. The dancers, dropping apart, looked around, their eyes swam dazedly into focus, and a woman took up the cry in a high nervous voice: "Hail, Gail!"

"Not a bad line, 'Hail, Gail,' " Mr. Outwater said, as he took Gail by the hand and elbow. "Proud of myself for that; sounds like some of your copy."

There were scattered introductions and the clasps of wet hands.

"New bottle for Winbourne!"

This produced a chorus:

"New bottle for Winboin!"

The humor of this convulsed the dancers, and several high shrieks came forth from the woman with the high nervous voice. Gail in an endeavor to become at home in this unaccustomed environment drank the glass that was handed to him too rapidly, and hiccoughed.

"There, there, dear!" said the woman, who leaned toward Mr. Outwater, putting her hand on Gail's knee and resting her weight on the hand. "Nossofast, boy, nossofast! S'real stuff, Gail, no sympathetic shampay tall!"

"So I see," said Gail, immediately after feeling an inadequacy in his words.

"Soee sees! Soee sees, Bee!" She shifted herself to Mr. Outwater. Gail felt his face assuming an absurd and rigid smile that trembled slightly at the corners. The wine was nowise aiding his confusion. He caught Mr. Outwater's right eye in a prolonged wink. He tried to wink back, and the woman caught him at it with her wandering eyes.

"Kidding me, are you?" she said, with great difficulty fixing her look upon him. "Think I'm drunk, don't you? Well, I am, see?" She closed one of her eyes in what attempted to be a mockery of his wink, and resulted in an expression so distorted that Gail involuntarily looked away. One of the men,

having somehow disembarrassed himself of his partner, had drawn up a chair on his other side, and now put a hand on his arm.

"My name is Kleit," this person interpolated. "Kleit underwear, y'understand. These dames are some of my models, y'understand. Don't mind 'em. See that one over there by the window. Good looker. Sense enough to stay sober, too. She's a lot higher class 'n the rest. She's a brassière model, she is. Say, old Bee is right there, isn't he? Turns out the finest copy outa his place I've ever seen. Sells, too, I'll bet. Understand you write most of it."

"No," said Gail, "not most."

"Great business, copy," resumed Mr. Kleit. "Mysterious, psychological business. Don't you find it damn psychological?"

"Yes, that's pretty much the secret of it," said Gail. He was warming now with his third glass of real champagne. A voice within him said: "What's pretty much the secret of what?"

"Trouble with a lot of us business men," Kleit continued, "is we don't know the meaning of that word psychological. You creative fellers know, all right. But what gets me is this working in the dark you must be doing all the time. Never really know your wave-length."

"Well, you do and you don't," said Gail. He looked up at Mr. Kleit, and seeing his eyes kindling with interest at this remark, wondered how he was going on from there.

"That's just it, you do and you don't," said Kleit, stopping in evident suspense. Gail plunged in suddenly.

"You do, because you know that the old human interest spark is still a live, hot spark. There are certain fundamental appeals that are universal. But, on the other hand, you don't, because you're never quite sure when the saturation point on any particular—on any particular—line, as it were, has been reached. Take Vitapore," Gail took courage from taking Vitapore, "times were just right for the prohibition suggestion. I used it and it worked. But some day the saturation point on prohibition is going to be reached. The public won't stand for any more of it. Then we've got to get away to a new start or the thing falls flat."

Mr. Kleit was profoundly fascinated. Gail, inspired by the gleam in his greenish eyes and by a fourth glass of wine, became confidential.

"There are lots of people right in this game," he said with the immense confidence of fluency in a new language, "who solemnly maintain that there is no such a thing as a saturation point in advertising. Lot of 'em say that because they want to convince themselves and their clients that a big splurge

with great quantities of money is bound to get big results by the sheer force of it. Now there's a method neither Outwater nor I believe in."

There was a sound to that "neither Outwater nor I." It was impressive. It was so impressive to Gail that he paused an instant after it, wondering if Mr. Outwater had heard. The music struck up, drowning a few loud and maudlin conversations. The music made him bolder, and he went on:

"Outwater and I advise a client to go at it gradually—and without waste. There's the key—without waste—like any business." Mr. Kleit's face was very close to Gail's now; it was a pointed, mouse-like face with high cheek-bones and almost green in color; the whites of his eyes, too, were greenish, as if some of the pigment had strayed out of the pupils; the lips were too large and distorted where the fat stub of a cigar, long lifeless, protruded. Gail felt an instant's nausea and fought it down.

"Without waste," he repeated, "but with art." It was a slightly difficult sentence, and he said it over to be sure that it was heard. Kleit nodded. "Art is the thing. Nothing more insidious than real art."

At this point Gail's head swam a little. The air in the room was thick; so thick that the air outside seemed unable to penetrate it through the open window; he saw the dancers in a haze; their feet seemed not quite touching the floor. A glass crashed with a little sound and the cymbals mimicked it with a gross mockery. An elevated train rumbled by outside.

The Jew beside him was talking on, and he caught occasional snatches.

"My business, fifty per cent, mind you . . . last year . . . the war did it . . . my business . . . barrels of money . . . pure psychology . . . money . . . my business . . . war . . . per cent."

Gail felt himself nodding mechanically at inconsequent intervals. Then there was a getting up and a shaking of hands.

"Damn glad t've met you. Give you a ring to-morrow. Wanta talk it over more, yes, yes! By-by!"

And somehow Mr. Kleit and the girl who was higher class than the rest had swum away and out the door. Gail reached out his hand for a bottle. It was empty. Another was empty. Then he went back to the first and it was full. Wondering vaguely, he seized it by the neck and poured himself out a drink. With infinite pains he removed a tiny bit of cigarette ash, and drank down the cold wine. It tasted so good he drank another. No one was paying attention to him. He looked up at the window and saw a broad familiar back. He went to the window, inserted himself next the broad back and leaned out.

"Bad air," said Mr. Outwater.

"Rotten," said Gail. "Good party, though."

"No, my boy," said Mr. Outwater. "It's a rotten party. Maybe good business, but it's a rotten party. And to-morrow you better forget it; glad you saw Kleit, but I'm sorry I got you down here. Business, that's all. Hell!"

A great sobriety came suddenly over Gail.

"Forget it, boy," Mr. Outwater went on. "Don't want you to think of me as doing this kind of thing. But I know you're the kind that'll forget it, and to-morrow everything will be the same again in the office. I know you'll forget it because I know you're a gentleman. I got a great affection for you, boy. I admire your culture and I envy it sometimes. I never got it myself. You've got something I never can get."

They stood silent. Off in the yellow haze of the sky gigantic horses galloped through flashing colors, and the wheels of a mammoth chariot turned.

"But it's a gorgeous game," said Mr. Outwater.

"It is," said Gail.

Suddenly a cold hand was thrust between them, and a little spray of moisture came cold on his neck. Gail was sickened by overpowering perfume. He turned and saw a girl with brilliant lips squeezing a tiny atomizer. She put her hands on his shoulders.

"Nice perfume!" she said, and kissed him.

For an instant only, with her nearness and the heavy scent, the beginning of a monstrous passion stirred in Gail; he relaxed, and his body seemed to sink under the force of it; but with the passing of the instant came sickness and an infinite disgust, and he forced himself out of her embrace and ran out the door.

He heard some one say "sick," as the door closed; he looked back; the door had been opened and a head stuck out:

"All right?"

"All right. Goodnight!"

His voice echoed down a long, empty corridor.

The street was cool and empty. He felt an immense gratitude for the air. But as he turned the corner the sound of the orchestra above came to his ear, the scent rose from his coat and whelmed him with the colossal grossness of the odor, the whole revolting scene came back, and the compensating mechanism of his body turned in a relieving fit of demonstrative sickness.

On Fifth Avenue, under weaving festoons of forgotten lights, he was utterly alone. It was good to be alone in this vast night, with all the lights

burning for his triumphal march. He laughed aloud. He seemed immensely funny to himself, small Gail among these immensities!

"Oh, ludicrous and little person," he began, in pleasant sounding soliloquy, "yellow, friendly lights and white indifferent stars look down through these silent spaces on this lone and wandering atom. If you'd heard me a while ago, with my mysterious psychology, you'd laugh merrily enough. Perhaps you did hear me. I believe all these lights and stars, and the hiding moon, wherever she is, heard me and are laughing now."

This thought of universal laughter at himself delighted him, because he, too, was laughing.

"Everything is funny," he said. "The universe is rocking with laughter, swaying, slapping its thigh!"

This conceit of the universe slapping its thigh incapacitated him for further motion, and he leaned against a store front, and a gorgeous convulsion of mirth swept through him. There poured out in that single laugh the manacled mirth of many months of suppression; it seemed as if laughter came to him as a new discovery; he took the same delight in it, in this simple child moment, as a baby takes in its first walking.

But when he discovered, after a long outpouring of his innocent joy, that the universe had got bored with him and was staring at him again with its peculiarly universal and indifferent stare, and that, in addition to the universe a policeman, coming out of the shadow of the opposite side of the street, was fixing him with a peculiarly interested one, he gathered the loose parts of his body that, somehow, had strayed into incongruous and impossible relations with each other, and took up his march, grandly sober.

But the laugh had died in him by the time he felt his way secretly into the apartment and with infinite care crept into his bedroom and dropped the clothes from his suddenly tired body. The hidden moon had unveiled herself, and beams of her shone broadly into the room and on the placid face and closed eyes of Muriel. Gail regarded her a moment, aware of her beauty in this radiant pallor of the moon, then sank into bed and into immediate and unfathomable sleep. Yet in the instant of his dropping through undivided space a sudden scent came up to him, unhappily reminiscent, stirring a momentary and monstrous memory.

And Muriel, her face in the utter repose of sleep, was keenly and agonizingly awake in all her senses, and her bedfellow, through that long, restless night, was a new monster of suspicion.

XVI

As the spring drew into the summer Gail's life became ever more complicated. His activities multiplied until Vitapore became only an incident. He discovered that an advertising agency did many things besides merely advertise. He found, for example, that certain products could be used for purposes for which they had not been intended. How dull life would be if things were used only for what they were intended to be used for. A chair, for example, meant to be sat on; never to be used to hang clothes on, or stand on, or pile books on! So Gail found that a substance originally made as a gargle was an invigorating scalp rub, a remedy for cuts on the finger, sunburn, freckles, a pleasant tooth-cleanser, and comforting to tired feet.

He learned that soap rubbed into the eyes was as serviceable as a specially prepared eye-lotion. There seemed to be almost endless permutations of some of the simplest commodities.

Many new accounts were added to his list. There were dress-shields, about which he must be always tasteful. There were "brassières," in which he must always avoid the vulgar suggestion. And there was underwear.

Now Gail had been brought up, not in the old school, where the body was taboo, nor in the new, where it was almost a duty to make a secret of nothing; but he had felt within himself that certain portions of life were desirably veiled. It had delighted him, in his early youth, to behold a girl exquisitely clothed, and with delicate care exercised in her appearance; and this had pleased him, not solely for itself but because there was mystery in the manner of its achievement. Perhaps he had been almost unconscious of preparation, supposing the other sex to be naturally lovely. When Muriel had appeared before him in the supreme moments of her radiance he had definitely avoided inquiry into the attainment of such surpassing allurement. It was part of the mystery of love; in too great familiarity love itself might gain contempt.

So he was a little revolted in his new work, which penetrated so searchingly into details. He was slightly revolted at the necessity for making them so universally public; even translated, as they were, into delicate terms. But such revulsions passed in the hardening of habitude.

Not that such hardening could seriously affect his character or the fulness of his love. But, hardened thus, he lost the desire for relief from it which had at first so obsessed him. And, hardened thus, he had great—almost unlimited—capacity for work. So the nights at the office continued.

There were, of course, free evenings, when Gail was at home or took his wife to the theatre. He was coming to find the latter amusement preferable; lately there had been dinner first at a restaurant, and supper after on a cool roof. Yet Gail had not suspected her suspicion. Had he begun to suspect it on an evening, the intricate detail of the next morning's work would have driven it from him. During the day, of course, his mind gave no access to such thought, or, in fact, to any thought but that of the Game which, in the beginning, had been so easy, and now required the whole of his mental mechanism.

One night after the theatre they sat atop a hotel roof, dancing and watching the dancing, munching at a sandwich and drinking tasteless punch with the intensely tragic expressions on their faces with which persons in New York engage in these exercises. The whole group of dancers and spectators appeared to be performing a peculiarly arduous part of their day's work. At some tables men were arguing and gesticulating with each other across the table, forgetting the women who, seeing that the subject of discussion was without their province, sat and stared straight ahead of them, with sagged faces and glassy eyes, or busied themselves with their vanity boxes. At other tables people ate with equal concentration. At others they drank with feverish intensity, and their drinking made them either more intensely serious or reduced them to helpless and pathological hysteria. No one laughed or smiled except as the result of some break in his nervous system.

After a silence Gail and Muriel spoke at once. Muriel said:

"Gail, why do you have to work—" and stopped.

Gail said: "Do you see that fat man over by the orchestra, waving his hands?"

"You mean that awful Jew?"

"Yes. That is where our money is going to come from, dear—yours and mine."

"Oh!" The blood went suddenly from her face leaving pathetic vermilion patches on a white ground.

"What's the matter, dear? That's Jacob Olfleisch of the Shewantsa Company. He's our biggest client."

"Is that his wife?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've had the misfortune to meet his wife. The thin bird on the other side is Kleit, the underwear manufacturer. The woman with him used to pose for the photographs of his advertisements until I made him stop using photographs."

"You mean she posed in—in——"

"Yes," said Gail, "in those."

Muriel's beautiful face was painfully contorted.

"Oh, Ga-il!" she said. "But you—you—you didn't have to do anything about—I mean—about making those photographs?"

"No, no," said Gail, a little irritably. "I told you I made him stop using photographs when he came to us. No advertiser should ever use photographs of people, because they are almost sure to be vulgar. In the first place, photography can never be made an art, and the public demands art in advertising. In the second place, the girls who pose for these photographs are generally—well—look at that girl's face! Would you buy things because you saw a photograph of her in them? No, you'd run from them. Yet she has a very beautiful figure."

"How do you know she has?"

Gail laughed. "How funny and suspicious you look! It is difficult to be in the advertising business long and not recognize that face and figure. She is the heroine of 'Foam-Fleck bathing-suits,' 'Parfums d'Allure,' and several brassières, as well as the 'Kleit-knit' products."

"Have you ever had the misfortune to meet *her*?" Muriel said, with an irony far too obvious to escape Gail. He winced under this cut, and unhappily blushed—a boy habit that he had never overcome.

"Look here, Muriel," he said suddenly, "are you accusing me of intimacies with this kind of people? Good God!"

He sat back in his chair and his arms dropped to his sides, and he looked so hurt and helpless that it seemed as if Muriel must have been very much indeed under the influence of her suspicion not to be weakened by his look. She did say, however:

"No, no, Gail; I was joking. You said you had the misfortune to meet Mrs.—that dreadful Jew's wife, so I thought you might have had the same bad luck with Miss—Miss——"

Gail did not supply the name. He was very busy thinking. In the last few seconds' conversation he had come to feel that a new chasm of great

proportions yawned between them. To be sure, the map of their life, as he looked back on it now, seemed lined with such crevasses, yet they had all been bridged. The bridging of this one would be difficult enough.

Muriel, observing that a slightly cynical look was coming on Gail's face as the result of his thinking, decided that she had hurt him enough for the time. He must not become cynical. If he became cynical there were no limits to which he might not go. In the few novels, through which Muriel's occasional pursuits of literature had carried her, men became cynical, and after that there were no limits. No, she must save him while there was yet time. Yet could she save him without talking to him? And how could she talk to him now about this suspicion with which, as with some real and definite being, she was, as it were, leagued against him?

Thus, by the long policy of silence had the crevasse grown. Thus, often enough, betwixt two fondly loving persons, locked in that most intimate of all relations, an abyss will spring, and that because pride, or some other of those colorings with which, as with cosmetics, we paint our inner selves, inhibits our conversations. But as silence is the father of suspicion, so also suspicion depends utterly upon silence for the whole course of its existence. Once the silence is broken the suspicion ceases—as a suspicion. It may take on the body of grim and horrible fact, or it may dissipate in the thin air.

If, for example, Muriel had brought into the open her torments following Gail's pungent arrival at the apartment in the young hours of that May morning there would, no doubt, have been a "scene." Gail would have accused her of not trusting him; Muriel would have asked what he could expect when, night after night, she was left alone with the tortures of her mind; Gail would have protested, over and over, the needs of his business; then, at the proper instant Muriel, wringing her hands and protesting that splendid primal protest, "so, then, you don't love me," would have burst into tears and the situation would have instantly resolved itself. Once on a time it would have been so done. We believe our ancestors, our fathers, forsooth, had more scenes than we and lived happier in the marital state. We almost believe the precipitation of the crockery and the smaller furniture to have been a wholesome demonstration, breeding harmony and affection.

Now we have "complexes," and we suppress them. We analyze our dreams, and because in a dream we discover ourselves to be a canvasback duck climbing a ladder, it becomes obvious to us that matrimony has failed; do we then go to our husband or our wife and say: "Darling, behold this dream which I had last night; how can we, in the face of it, continue to live in marital concord?" If we did we would shortly find ourselves simultaneously weeping and laughing in each other's arms. But we do not.

We brood and brood, and inhibitions multiply upon us. Eventually we find ourselves avoiding each other's glances and investigating the divorce laws.

If Gail had, on the morning following his involuntary escapade, given Muriel a comic account of it, with a casual reference to the atomizer of perfume, there at once would have been an end to the whole thing. But on that especial morning, arising with a bursting head, and seeing at the moment none of the incident's comic facets (if, indeed, it had any), he tried, naturally enough, to forget it, and as Muriel had, to all appearance, been asleep, felt no demand for explanation.

Now, however, these little and easy steps across the cracks which had later merged into this gaping fissure, occurred to him. They occurred to him sitting at the roof-garden table this hot June evening, so that he and Muriel (thinking also her own profound thoughts) became very silent, and their faces grew dark and glowering as the other faces in this place of gaiety.

Finally Muriel said: "We must go, Gail. It's late, and I'm tired."

Gail paid the bill and said: "Let's go up on the Bella Vista a minute. I want to see the whole of Broadway."

The Bella Vista is properly so named. It is a little path that wanders up above the roof proper, and gives a view both ways of Broadway. It is a spot neatly poised over the centre of the universe. Standing upon it in the night time, which is the only time one would dream of going there, one can see more electric lights in more different combinations and more different motions; one can read more propaganda, see more bigness, feel more thrills, do more philosophizing, acquire more respect or contempt for the human race or the American nation, or the laws of physics; one can feel more purified or more passionate, more conscious of the flesh and the devil and more aloof from it, than on any other pinnacle in the world. Swung midway betwixt the confluent white rivers of the streets and the low-brooding canopy of the yellow sky; midway betwixt the blissful yawn of the Fisk-tire boy and the incredible peacock pageant of the Wrigleys, its good vistas are all tributes to man's doing. No single work of God intrudes upon our contemplation. The sky is painted with our light, the stars whelmed by it as by the sun. The white rivers below are man-dug, man-paved, and run flooding with living men; look where they fork there below, how fairly the one runs on in its restless riot of iridescent foam; how sinister the other, darker and darker in its distance, stagnant and evil, trickling at last into a little ugly rivulet where ugly things are thrown!

And Gail, observing these many things, drank deep of the air, and said:

"How big it is!"

"Too big," said Muriel, so quietly that Gail, immensely absorbed by his thought, did not hear.

"What tremendous people Americans are! Look what a scale they think on. Look at this great blaze of mad color. Look at the size of it. It's grand!" Gail had a way of saying a thing was "grand" which made one know he meant it, and felt it; "grand" was not slang with him; the word had a sense to him that made it unique, and none other did as well. He stopped an instant, rapt in his contemplation. Then, as if some one had contradicted him, he went on: "But it *is* grand. And it's beautiful in a large, terrific kind of way. A kind of delirium of light. I like big, delirious, powerful things. Look at that cat with the ball of yarn. A child, mildly feverish, might have conceived that cat. It is all a fairy-land of a child imagination."

Muriel was strangely unresponsive. Gail looked at her face, motionless and pale, in the reflected light of the city and then looked down. She had not understood, he thought; did not, could not understand. Women looked at details and had no grasp of wholes. And Muriel, besides, could see only the thing, the fact; nothing behind it or under it, no motive, no symbol.

But it was Gail who did not understand. Muriel's silence was more deep than to be accounted for by this philosophizing. It was not that she failed to see because she could not see, but because her being was in the moment absorbed by one thought, a thought which, in woman, is sometimes all-preclusive.

"But why," she said, "does it keep you so much away?"

An irritation at this small intrusion of the personal quivered through Gail. He looked down at the lights, and seeing only the lights looked back into her face. There was a tiny tremble of her lip, a little helpless child movement of her chin, and in the instant he melted in quick contrition.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've been a—a— I've been rotten. I'm sorry."

He took her hands and looked into her face, beautiful in the hanging mist of light. An instant her eyes looked back at him with a pitiful hunger in them; then suddenly something came between that seemed to blind her; she turned away as if she had seen some monstrous and frightening thing.

"No," she said, and shook her hands free.

"Why, darling! What have I done?"

An old question, spoken now in the pain of hurt innocence. Two people came up the steps, nudged each other, and stared. Muriel turned.

"We must go," she said.

In the apartment Muriel went suddenly into her bedroom and shut the door. They had said no word on the way home, sitting next each other with an impenetrable wall between. No word. Each, drawn into himself, spun round him that protective silence.

Yet when she had shut the door of her room Gail's pride dropped from him. The quiver of her face up there in the yellow light came, hurting, back to him with the shutting of his eyes. Why? Why? How many a man, helpless in the presence of this single, silent woman-thought, has uttered that pitiful, querying monosyllable! But when, after a long time of confused thinking, he went into their room, he tiptoed lest he wake her.

In the morning, after prolonged, motionless sleeplessness, while each feared lest the other wake, Gail was so troubled that even the game failed to encompass him. He revolved in his mind the few words and looks, and little unspoken things, and menacing silences of the night before, and found the problem difficult. Such things he was long, long unaccustomed to grapple with. Time was, now far back and across an abyss, when he was concerned with even subtler human psychology than that which suggested the choice of a soap or lotion, that he would have found such strange conflict an absorbing thing; and the way out less hard. But now even the habit of thinking seemed gone from him. He could not speculate beyond the facts.

The facts were patent, quite obviously revealed last night. He had neglected Muriel, and she was, naturally, upset about it. This he repeated to himself many times. At this point, however, a shadow appeared of something more, vague and a little threatening. He ignored it and went back to the facts. One could alter them. This was simple enough. One could work at home, or even, for a time, not work. One might dodge a few of the social events of the day: luncheons, "one thing and another," and get things cleaned up in the office. He would do it, and it would all come out right. A little cheer, a little enthusiasm at home!

He turned back to his work.

But why, when that was said and arranged, why this uneasy sense of something more? Why this shadow across the way, ahead, formless, dark, as of some ugly thing one feared to turn and face? He hardly saw it; felt it rather, as one feels sometimes that the sun has gone suddenly under a cloud and the color gone out of things.

He turned back to his work.

When noon came the bustle and talk outside reminded him that it was Saturday. A pile of papers lay on his desk. He turned his chair and looked

out on the haze of a warm, golden, summer day. With an effort he swept the papers into a basket, put on his hat, and went out of the office.

On the way home he bought a car.

It was not the roadster the chief had shown him; that was still of the future, along with the Georgian house and the purple liveries; but a pleasant little car, brightly painted, and aping in its lines the rakish air of its costly superiors. It was a car advertised by the Outwater Agency; he had criticised and advised about some of the copy when the chief had called him in to meet the New York manager. As Gail stood before the window of the store seeing, with avid eyes, what seemed the solution of his troubles, this manager came out, and, recognizing him, spoke genially:

"Well, well, so here's the young copy expert! Read a piece about you in *The Agate Line*! Understand you're the coming baby! How do you get away with it? Sure was a warm line you handed the boss that day about his own pet layout for the fall campaign!"

"Well," said Gail, "I think you've got a good proposition there, and I want to see you put it over. The chief had some nice ideas on it, too, but there were two holes in the art end of that ad, according to my way of looking at it. I've got a pretty definite theory about the use of photographs."

"Yes, 'n I believe you've got the right dope. What was it you said about supersaturated psychology? No question about it. But the best line you pulled was that one about the roadster coming toward you, instead of in profile."

They talked for several minutes, standing each with a foot on the brass stand-pipe in front of the window, in the manner of New Yorkers discussing their business. It ended by their going into the store and coming out the back door in a new "sport" model, with the manager at the wheel.

They took a little drive through the park, and Gail, after raucous experiments with the gears, got the knack of it. They talked over the difficulties of the ready-money problem, and a satisfactory system of payments was adopted. They made the proper license negotiations, and the manager, looking at his watch and discovering that the whole transaction had taken little over an hour, burst out into loud laughter.

"Never made a quicker sale," he said. "And, believe me, if I wasn't pretty sure of my little old boat I never would have tried to put it over on my ad man. Believe me, boy, you got nothing to regret. Now, if you'll just drive me around to my club, we'll have a little lunch with fixings, to celebrate. Believe me——"

"Sorry," said Gail, when they arrived, "but I'm overdue at home."

They parted with the usual farewells, each promising to give the other a "ring" at early opportunity, and Gail, now relieved from the restraint of his full emotions, drove joyfully home.

Muriel, sitting through that endless morning in the apartment she had beautified for Gail, went through long, long, painful wondering. It was not usual for her to sit thus in the morning; morning was the time for doing things, arranging, ordering the day, making a little round of shops, preoccupied in the happy resource of Things. To-day, there was inertia, perhaps because the night had been so restless, the thought it had bred so absorbing. The windows were open and flies buzzed languorous about them; light summer sounds came from the hot street, a seller of fruits making his strange wordless call, a little unhappy organ grinding old, tired tunes. How weak that organ—a last effort of drooping age before comfortable death should gather it and its grinder and the memories of its tunes into his all-compassing arms. Summer. Settled, lazy, soft summer. A mingled scent of it, hot pavements, sweet, warm, rotting fruit from the wagon across, and a remote breath of flowering things blown in from some distant park, drifted elusive, quick-fading, into the room and stirred such haunting remembrance that Muriel paused an instant in her wondering to breathe it and wonder more.

It was a weariness to think, this tired day. Somewhere in that lazy memory was a cool place, deep in green shade, and a little stream talking; light wind laden with hay scent; Gail, dreaming his old, forgotten way; the faint touch of new love, unsatisfied, half afraid. Ah, to be back there! To be out of this prison of thinking, with its ugly shadows and its stalking things behind, and love flown out to the sky.

The summer scent was gone, and Muriel's brows drew together in an agony. Had Gail so changed from that tousle-headed boy, stretched out on his back in the green and looking up at her with one eye so solemn and the other laughing? Had he changed that she must see always now that black carrion crow of her suspicion hovering over him? Less than a year from that happy time, when she promised to him again and again her eternal trust, and all the whispering love-making things about them had seemed to echo her words. Whispering things had loved and burgeoned and died with the summer; and *their* love, parcel of eternity, dead with the next?

Must men so change?

Late, ugly night and a sickening scent on the air. Had she dreamed it? Was it real, that awful moment when her heart had turned, of a sudden, within her, and the tentacles of that dark thing so long hanging above her

had twisted cold about it? It seemed so far this hot, lazy day, so nearly forgot, half-humorous in retrospect, like an absurd nightmare.

Yet it was there. And her love was dead in a ghastly scented instant. Had he killed it or she? Had she imagined, built up on nothing, a scheme of gross and horrible thought? Perhaps. There were ways it might have happened, innocent enough. She knew that he experimented, or people in his office experimented with this or that perfume, their toys, their great products they talked so much about. (How little he talked of love and all his old dreams!) He had been fussing, that night, with their perfumes?

She would ask him. When he came home she would ask him. But, no, how could she go back over all that distance? And how could she begin by telling him of her suspicion?

"Gail," she would say, "there's something I've been meaning to ask you about——"

Good heavens, no! A thousand times no! She could see his face suddenly responsive, expectant of serious questioning. She might go to him and put her arms about his neck, and say: "Gail, tell me—" and then blurt it out and cry. He would tell her if she cried—or he would not tell her, and she would know. It would be better to know—anything.

Would it be better to know? Might she not now put it all out of her mind, suppress it? Go on as before, but be nicer to him, more loving, less cold? She tightened with the effort. But no, again no; she could not bear his arms about her in his love with that shadow of that—that—other woman upon them. She buried her face in her hands and a shudder ran through her. Muriel was very young.

No, it was impossible. She must ask him and get it over, somehow, ask him, break the intolerable silence. She would go to him and take both his hands and say something, and he would know she was suffering, and somehow she would say it. And he would gather her in his arms and say: "You child!" Or he would be angry. But she would say it.

A door banged below and quick steps came up the stairs. He had come. She would say it now. His key turned in the latch. She would say it.

Suddenly he was in the room, dishevelled, his hat thrown into the corner, his face all alight, laughing. In an instant he had seized her hand and dragged her to the window.

"Look!" he said, all breathless, pointing into the street. "Ours!"

Muriel followed his pointing finger with her eyes. Her hand in his made no response, there was no quickening of her body. He turned and looked at her, surprised and vaguely hurt. She was still looking out the window, but

her eyes were confused and unseeing. He took her other hand and turned her toward him. She looked an instant into his eyes. Then her own, still strangely confused as if some persisting thought had been unwillingly interrupted, quickly fell.

"Darling," he said, "you don't understand! It's ours! Our own. Our first car!"

In the instant something dropped from her. The whole of her resolve was obscured, obliterated, the persistent thought faded and forgot. Reality came sudden upon her, the room came back into focus; there was something expected of her; she must respond; with all her mind concentrated on initiating; she must respond.

"Oh, Gail!" she said. "Oh, I didn't understand; I didn't really, Gail! Do you mean you've bought a car? For us, Gail?"

There was a flat sound to the words. They came from her mechanically, as one said little, formal, necessary things.

But Gail, his thought gone back to the car, heard only her words and not the manner of her speaking.

"Come, get a hat and come down quickly, and we'll go way off somewhere into the country for a long day. It's a Somerset sport model; a knock-out; know the manager—carry his account—come on, darling, make it fast!"

"But lunch, Gail! Have you had lunch?"

"No, we'll go somewhere!"

They went somewhere; Gail, in the going, explaining every detail of the mechanism; through their lunch he told the story of his buying, and what he had said to the manager, and what the manager had said to him—all in a burst of nervous, keyed-up enthusiasm, and in the meticulous detail with which the players of the Game, and other games, tell things to each other. His words tumbled and his sentences were joined by a multitude of "and thens." It was at once an exceedingly simple and very complex description, with little fancy. Muriel found herself curiously bored by it all; wondering when he would stop and lapse into one of his old silences. It was unlike him, this running on and on about things. Yet lately he had done it often enough, and she had not listened, quietly pursuing her own thought through the midst of his chaotic words.

She looked up at him and saw his face drawn and tense. It was as if some mechanism within him had been wound to a great tightness and let go. His eyes were narrowed and lines had come at the corners of them; a curious artificial light—a glow that seemed, somehow, produced by this rapid

unwinding—burned and faded, burned and faded in the rhythm of his words. The whole of him was unreal, almost stranger to her.

Through it she thought: "When we get into the country all this will go; he will be his old self and we will talk."

But when they got into the country Gail became absorbed (which added to the danger of his, at best, uncertain driving) in the signs along the road; which of them were "ours"; which of them were good copy; which of them "pulled"; how much they cost; what he had told Mr. Outwater about this and that element of appeal; why this was "insidious" and that beyond the "saturation point." And when they had got away from the signs he told stories and anecdotes of the office, all with his face tortured and tense, and his voice high. It seemed to Muriel that he must stop of exhaustion; as if the spring must finally uncoil itself and relax; then the uneasy sense came over her that he could not stop.

They had dinner in the beginning of the twilight at a road-house where cocktails were brought in bouillon cups. Gail ordered the dinner, and ate it without giving it an instant's attention, so absorbed was he in his talk. Muriel sat, eating almost nothing and nodded at intervals, sometimes asking a mechanical question, but for the most part looking out over the heads of the people on the crowded piazza to the west sky, where the sun had gone and the new moon was going. What a night to be alone with Gail and love, through the long twilight and the coming of the dark and the faint, cool smells of wood roads! But love was gone, and somehow Gail had gone, too, and this strange nervous-talking person come in his stead. Would he come back, that lost Gail, of a long past summer?

Yet when they took the way home, and, after a few remarks about the action of the car, he lapsed utterly into silence, she was dead with fatigue, and through the slow, solemn entrance of the night, she slept.

Once, as the car hummed down a long slope to twinkling lights, and the broad white band that was the river, he spoke. But Muriel slept.

She woke an instant between the dark walls of the ferry-boat and asked, half afraid, in this strange waking, where they were, then dropped again in sleep.

At home, when Gail had left her and gone to seek shelter for his car, she threw herself on her bed, too tired to undress. She lay there in dulled consciousness till she heard his key in the latch; then hearing him in the sitting-room, fussing over his papers, she undressed in feverish haste and between the cool sheets dropped off again to abysmal sleep. It was the end

of a long line of restless nights, and the mechanism that adjusts itself so patiently to our unnatural lives had broken.

And Gail, his papers spread out before him, worked. He worked with high-keyed energy into the first dawn, then, dazed and swaying, found his way to bed. In the relaxing of his body, a sudden fit of sobbing came over him; he sobbed in long-drawn child sobs into the suffocating pillow; a flooding agony of helpless, meaningless weeping, and in the long, half-conscious relief after, he wondered vaguely why he had so wept.

XVII

In the fall came a "raise." Magnificent, new wealth, fancy-provoking. It so diverted him and Muriel from the dangerous topic of themselves that their life took, as it were, new lease. It presented to their senses, dulled with the slight settling which often appears in married life in the waning of the first summer, a vista of possibilities so thrilling that the mere contemplation of it was like looking at a sunrise of many colors. Their troubles faded like the night.

They moved out of their little apartment and into the country; one of the New Jersey suburbs that are so like younger brothers of the city, with streets plotted at right angles and naked skeletons of houses starting up from them everywhere. Here and there a house was finished and trying to look lived in, and little garden plots about it, carefully planned and with awful promises starting out of the ground in strange colors; fences, glistening with paint aligned themselves in neat symmetry, and gravel walks that seemed so meticulously laid, each tiny stone juxtaposed with its neighbors, that one feared to walk on them, and flanking the gravel paths bare patches where the grass had failed to fulfil the catalogue promises.

Respectably out of this plotted village arose a little hill, on which were trees and a rough stucco house with a red-tiled roof and somewhat forbidding appearance enhanced by a suggestion of battlements protecting the two top gable windows. It was the ugliest house, Gail thought, he had ever seen; but the realtor, a client of his company, argued and wheedled about it, and came down in price, so he rented it. Behind it was an untenanted valley, one of those strange, almost wild, forgotten patches that one finds sometimes on the edges of New Jersey suburbs—perhaps because they are difficult to plot and garden, and city folk are afraid to venture on land so irregular. Gail liked the valley, and made himself a den whose windows gave upon it, where, in intervals of resting he would brood and write. Still that faint, haunting hope that some day he would shake off the world and the Game awhile and write! His bedroom and Muriel's bedroom faced the south and civilization, because bedrooms must have southern exposures.

It was busy and exciting while they moved and rearranged. Then, when they were "settled" there were calls from those below them in the village,

and they learned the standards to which they should conform, and Gail was made a member of the golf club and urged to learn to play; and they joined the church and Muriel was put on a church committee, and Gail was nominated and subsequently elected on a council. Life became busier and busier. There was little time to love, and little time to worry about not loving. And, to be sure, love is not needed where there is so much activity, and marriage may thus be a success when the glamor has lifted. It is vastly happier not to be able to think, for it is thought that destroys.

Yet with it all, here is Gail, sometimes in the late evening, in his den, his arms on the sill of the window and his chin on his arms, watching the valley fill with the light-flood of the hunter's moon, thinking and wondering with faint, warm patches of the past alight in his memory as the patches of the valley below with the white moonlight, wondering and brooding whither love is flown and youth and life are flying.

And Muriel, sometimes, tired of the day's motion, sobbing on her bed.

And why? Why? Prosperity and peace, busy, throbbing life, movement, color, change, all in a quick-turning world adapted by man to his uttermost convenience—a luxurious world with all the gods of all the machines standing at attention before him to gratify his lightest wish; food at his hand, light at his touch, warmth, self-regulating; cool and fair linen for his body, soothing remedies for his faintest ills, soft, healing balms for his skin, and the scents of Araby. . . .

One night the great Mr. Outwater and his wife came for dinner and to spend the night. There were days of elaborate preparation. Their house must show to the best advantage; show what Gail and his "little wife" had done with the opportunities this great chief had given them; show enough prosperity to justify a decent pride and at the same time capacity for more. It was not an easy thing, this, and there was much discussion. It was in these discussions of Things that Gail and Muriel, strangely, came nearest each other. For here was something they could talk about without thinking; something they could even laugh over. The night before the great event, when Gail was putting out his light, Muriel came softly in with an afterthought that had kept her from sleeping.

"Ga-il!" she said suddenly, and Gail, his hand on the chain of the electric light, looked up, startled. "Gail, don't you think maybe we ought to have cocktail sauce with the oysters, after all?"

She stood a little awkwardly, like a child, looking very small in her bright-blue pajamas, and her hair, caught in the cool draft from the open window, blew in her eyes. Her eyes, dark green, looked up at him from

under long lashes a little mocking; all the trouble that had long been growing in her face was suddenly gone, and the hint of a smile played at her mouth.

Gail heard no word of her important question. He only saw her standing there with the old mockery in her eyes. He stood a moment, held by the sweetness of overwhelming memory. Then, switching off the light, he took her suddenly in his arms.

It was strange how, in that long night they seemed so desperately clinging to a transient happiness; to something precious, of the moment, that would soon be gone—perhaps even with the daylight. So desperately they clung to it that neither would venture to speak what was, above all else, in their minds; to ask the simple question: "What is it, that in these last months has come between us?"

The next night Gail drove the Outwaters, crowded perhaps beyond the requirements of their dignity, in his little car, to his new home. Muriel, at the door, welcomed them. The serenity of her face and its light mockery were gone. She had the look of one desperately tired, making a last effort.

"You must buck up," Gail said to her when the Outwaters had been escorted to the pink, lacy guest-room.

"I don't know how I'll go through with it. One thing after another all day."

"That's better than having 'em come in bunches."

She looked up sharply.

"Don't," she said. "It's not funny. I don't know why you always think these things are funny."

It was many months since Gail had thought anything was funny. But to-day, with the memory of last night haunting him with warmth, he had been so gay that his grave-eyed fellow workers had been shocked at his lightness. It was almost as if some of himself had come back over the abyss and broken in on him as a warm day breaks sometimes through the winter, promising. But, at the look now in Muriel's tired eyes, it all chilled out of him. Perhaps if he had kissed her then and said: "Dear child, you're tired; I'm sorry." But he did not.

In a long hot bath he meditated languorously. It was comforting to meditate in a hot bath. He looked at his pale body and wondered what had happened to it since those days back in college, when he had looked at himself in a long mirror and been pleased with his straightness and the tightness of his skin. There was something relaxed about it now, sagged a bit; his muscles were not quite holding in his waist. It worried him so he

jumped out, and, standing on tiptoe, looked at the profile of himself in the glass. There was something wrong. There was something suggestive of a picture he had seen in an advertisement of how to stand, and how not to stand, and what happened to you—to you, too!—if you let yourself go. He must take those exercises. Mr. Outwater was taking them. He wondered what Mr. Outwater looked like with his clothes off. Then, suddenly, the vision of Mr. Outwater that night came back to him. That sordid night! The whole picture—the room, the women, the negro orchestra—came suddenly before his mind. How miserably, absurdly tight he had got—in self-defense! Entirely in self-defense. And that woman had squirted perfume on him. How he must have reeked when he went home. Good thing Muriel was asleep. Good thing . . . was she asleep? Was she asleep! He stopped, suddenly, with the bottle of life-giving Vitapore in his hand. One other time she had not been asleep. Was that it? Was that at the bottom of the whole wretched business? What a ridiculous thing! Reeking with alcohol and perfume. How ghastly he must have smelled! The whole room must have been soaked with it. The next morning. No, that night. He had been a little unsteady getting into bed—dropped a shoe, probably talked to himself. Yet she had never moved. She had been awake. She had heard him, seen him in the moonlight through half-closed eyes, seen him looking at her, smelled that appalling reek. He must ask her. He would ask her, and that would clear everything up. He would tell her the whole thing—explain it all—finish this horrible, silent manœuvring. He could tell her so she would know he was telling the truth. He would plead with her, beg her. He saw himself supplicating, saw the cold, suspicious look in her eyes melt suddenly under his imploring. He would tell her to-night. Ah, last night!

He poured Vitapore over his whole body and rubbed himself vigorously. Then he dressed and went down.

Muriel stood waiting in the chintz-hung drawing-room. She was transformed. Her lips were a deep red and had that smooth quality that one felt was resistant and wooden to the touch. In her cheeks were spots of color over a creamy whiteness. The lines were miraculously gone from a forehead that had gained the chill smoothness of marble; on it her eyebrows were drawn in thin, delicately curving lines.

“Is everything ready?” said Gail.

“The cocktails—sh!”

The Outwaters were coming down the stairs. Gail disappeared into the pantry to mix the cocktails. When he came back with the tray, Muriel was talking desperately.

The three were gathered before the fireplace in which a grate of imitation coals flickered blue flames with the aid of gas.

Mrs. Outwater was astonishingly the opposite of her husband. She was small, with almost imperceptible shoulders that seemed drawn together as if by a long habit of huddling from cold or fear; she was of indeterminate age, an effect produced, perhaps, by hair dyed auburn; her face was, in general, expressionless, yet with an expectant look about it as if hoping for the proper stimulus to enliven it. The stimulus came when her husband spoke; then she became transformed, her head drew back, her shoulders straightened, light came into her eyes and motion about her lips; her whole body became suddenly atingle with life. It seemed, almost, as if her heart beat and blood circulated through her only at those moments which he dominated; as if all function ceased in her when his presence dropped from the conversation.

As soon as Gail was observed the trio turned and became concentrated on the phenomenon of cocktails.

"Aha!" said Mr. Outwater. "I see that Mr. Volstead is not among us."

They all laughed at this, and Mrs. Outwater's face became ecstatic with the reflection of her husband's brilliance. "Of course, you understand, Winbourne my boy, I'm not a drinking man." He winked at Gail. "But, then, this is an exceptional occasion."

Mrs. Outwater declined with an "Oh, no—I never—" accompanied by a drawing together of her shoulders, and Muriel, with a reluctant look, held up her hand.

"The little wives are leaving it all to us, Winbourne."

At this point the maid appeared between folding doors, and Muriel, trying to look as if a burden had not suddenly descended upon her shoulders, said:

"I believe dinner is ready."

The conversation was of the quality usual on occasions when there is a tacit understanding that the one subject in which there is any common interest shall not be mentioned. They agreed upon the pleasantness of "our little home," no single detail of the house or grounds having penetrated the consciousness of either guest, except, perhaps, the trickling proclivity of the hot-water faucet in the guest bathroom; Gail went elaborately into his negotiations with the real-estate person, explaining that in his, Gail's, opinion the house was an ugly one but, well, it was Upham, you know, the realtor, and concessions were made on both sides, and here they were, anyway, on a try-out—short lease—and, at all events, the plumbing was

good. Mr. Outwater thought of the trickle, and remarked that indeed it was, and Mrs. Outwater interpolated that that made such a difference. Then they all agreed that the house did not, after all, make the home, at which Mrs. Outwater glowed, and observing no corresponding glow in her husband, immediately faded.

At this juncture there was a menacing pause which might have grown to desperate proportions had not Mr. Outwater injected that infallible stimulant, without which, in these days of specialization, many a promising conversation would have died in groping silence.

"Speaking of prohibition——"

The effect was immediate. Here at last was a universal topic, so formulated in all the details of its arguments that no new thought was necessary, or, indeed, possible. It was a common ground on which every one was at once at home, like the discovery of a mutual friend or book or play, or moving-picture or game; there was a comfortable settling in their chairs, and a new friendliness settled down over the table.

"Now I, for one, believe in it," Mr. Outwater went on, "not for you and me who know how to use, and not abuse, such things, but for the masses. Look at the results. The factory worker turns up Monday morning, sober and ready for hard work. On the first two days of the week you get a hundred per cent work out of him. Saturday night he goes home to his family. He buys food and clothes for his wife and children, keeps his self-respect, and is respected by others in his community. He takes an interest in keeping himself and his surroundings clean and wholesome. Why, you'd be surprised at the increase in the sale of soap, for one thing, among the poorer families. Small item, but indicative. No, I'm for it. I'll vote dry any day in the week."

"But, then," said Gail, with a twinkle, "you're not a drinking man."

He was surprised and a little embarrassed to see no answering twinkle in Mr. Outwater's concentrated and serious eye.

"Well, I wouldn't say that. No, I wouldn't say that. I'll take a drink with the next man. And, speaking of that, I don't mind saying I've got a little something lined up. I know a steward on the Cunard line can get me anything I want. Scotch, cognac—Hennessey five-star, mind you—champagne, light wines, beer—yes, beer!—damn good—I mean, darn good—excuse my French, ladies—but real beer, imported, with a head on it and percentage enough to make you warm here. Ran into him one day when I made that investigation of that new boat—what's the name of it?—little English boy, named Hopwood or Hopworth, says 'awf' and 'cawn't' and all

that. What is the name of that boat? Ends in a. I used to have a wonderful memory for names. I got a case of Haig & Haig Thursday——"

"Why, Bee!" said Mrs. Outwater delightedly.

Gail explained how he had got his, and thus the conversation progressed between the two men, each hearing no word of the other's talk in his anxiety to tell his own experience; the ladies, meantime, progressed naturally enough into the younger generation and what the world was coming to; both of them had read some books on the downfall of civilization, but neither could remember the titles or authors.

The division having now been established between the sexes, talk flowed smoothly enough through coffee and cigars in the drawing-room, and by the time the first cigar was completed Gail and his chief had drifted, naturally enough, into their business and were deeply absorbed. Observing this transition, the little wives discovered fatigue, and withdrew to let the men have their talk. The maid, carefully schooled, appeared immediately after with Scotch and siphon, and under this stimulus the men continued until long after midnight and developed that rare and beautiful intimacy which sometimes arrives even between high priests and neophytes under such happy circumstances. Gail was frequently instructed to keep this and that "under his hat," and a multitude of confidences were exchanged in what were intended to be whispers, accompanied by surreptitious glancings about and such asides as "between you and me and the gate-post" and "of course I wouldn't want this to get out," and "you understand my position," and so many similar adjurations that, by bedtime, Gail almost staggered under his responsibility. They then noisily mounted the stairs and parted, with affectionate remarks, at Mr. Outwater's door, where Gail asked, several times, if he had got everything he wanted.

Gail tiptoed quietly down the hall and stopped an instant outside Muriel's door. He wondered if she were asleep. There had been something he had meant to ask her. What was it he had meant to ask her? He switched out the hall light and saw a pink glow under the crack of the door. He put his hand on the knob and the glow vanished. He pushed open the door and asked:

"Are you asleep?"

There was no answer.

He went in. The draft came cold on his face and blew the door shut behind him. He spoke again:

"I saw your light," he said.

"Please go to bed."

“But why? I mean—why?”

“You’ve been drinking.”

“Of course. Didn’t expect me not to drink? There was something I wanted to speak to you about.”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“But what’s the matter, dearest? Can’t I talk?”

“Apparently not.”

There was a pause during which he hung in awful indecision. Then she spoke:

“What is it?”

“What?”

“What! What!”

“That’s what I say, what?”

“You said you had something to say. I wish you’d say it and go. I’m dead tired.”

“That’s the funny thing. I can’t remember what it was. It was an important thing, too. Important thing I had to say.”

There was a dignified silence after this. Then Muriel said:

“Aren’t you going?”

His indecision crystallized into an equally awful decision.

“No,” he said.

An appalling quiet settled on the room, broken only by Muriel’s regular breathing and the little, far sounds that came in the window. There was the whistle of a train, infinitely lonely in the distance, and a wisp of wind came up and rustled in the dead trees.

“Muriel.”

A dog barked twice and stopped.

“Muriel, dearest, what’s the matter? What have I done? Why, only last night—last night! Muriel! What is it that’s come between us?”

“Nothing.”

“But there is something. Why do you want me to go?”

“Because I’m tired, dead tired. I’ve worked all day on your dinner, worked and slaved to make it nice, and then—then——”

“Then what? It was a lovely dinner.”

“Yes, evidently. So lovely that you sit till two o’clock talking—business, business, business, everlasting business; soap and underwear, soap and

underwear; sit and talk and drink, and then when you're drunk, you come up and ask me what's come between us! I'll tell you what's come between us. It's your business, that's it! That and the things that go with it!"

A sudden stifling anger rose up in Gail and sobered him. Words came to his lips in a flood of bitterness, but he did not speak. Instead, he went out the door, and the draft banged it shut behind him.

XVIII

THE winter wore on, a mild but dreary winter, and spring was promising again before the crisis arrived in the lives of these young persons.

Gail had so developed his personality that he was made combined representative and copy man; Mr. Outwater found him attractive to clients, and inspiring their confidence. This attractive personality he had nurtured in himself through the "listening principle," a simple rule by which any of us may make himself liked, admired and trusted, and develop for himself a wide circle of friends. It consists, primarily, of listening while the other man talks. How few of us, after all, are good listeners! It demands, to be sure, a certain suppression of the ego and entails many a tiring hour for the listener, but these things are in the day's work, if one will sell, and in the last analysis each one of us must sell something, if only, indeed, himself. If you can sell yourself, say the books, the rest is easy. And the clients of B. Minturn Outwater were "sold," as the expression goes, "on Gail."

With his large inquiring eyes he drew them out. They poured amazing confidences into his ears; told him of the losses in their businesses, of the difficulties of production, of the defects in their merchandising policies, of the dissensions in their boards of directors, of the hundred other problems that made life so complex. And always he kept his eyes on theirs, held them, drew out their confessions with that sympathetic confident look that seemed to promise a solution for every trouble. And when they had told, and talked long about themselves, the mists rose before them and they would see the way out, often without a word from Gail. Their need seemed only for a confidant, a father confessor, some one who would listen.

"I have it!" they would say, a new gleam in their eyes. "I have it! What we need is organization."

"I believe you're right," Gail would answer, his face brightening with delight at this rare acumen, "organization and a sound, sane, merchandising basis. Once that is established and every department connected up with every other—and no loose connections, mind you; with every wheel oiled and ready, you will only need to turn on the current of vitalizing, enthusiastic publicity, and your shop runs like a watch."

It was easy, this. There was a formula for every situation. Here it was "a keener producer-to-consumer consciousness," there it was "a linking up of sales sense with copy suggestion," again it was "watching the saturation point." This last never failed. Yet, strangely, his memory stirred uneasily whenever he used it, pricked somehow by a vague, remote conscience. Then there was the football illustration. "Let me use an illustration from football. You know something of football? Of course. Well, visualize for a moment the quarterback behind the scrimmage line. What is the reaction of his psychology just before he launches the play? In that lightning-like flash of his consciousness he is picking a hole. He is picking a weak spot in the opposing line. He is picking a spot that has been pounded and pounded by your *off*ense and weakened by it. Now take your salesman. He, too, must think fast. He, too, must pick a hole, a weakness in the buyer's defense, and land his play square on that spot. What spot does he choose? He chooses the spot that has been pounded and pounded by the copy writer's offense. *There always is one.* No man's consciousness is without some hole that has been punctured and penetrated by the thrust of a head, a slogan, a catchword, the suggestion of a picture, the too sudden movement of a thought. Your good salesman is the man who discovers the hole and goes through it to the sold spot underneath.

"Remember there is a spot in every man's soul that is already sold on your product. Once you land on that the job is done. But the picking is often hard enough. It takes observation, keenness, perception, a knowledge of human nature, and above all a thorough background of study of the copy."

With the coming of spring, when the creative urge is said to stir with more than usual insistence, a glorious outlet was provided for Gail. He was detailed to write for *The Agate Line*, the great trade organ of the Game, a series of articles "tying up" the art of publicity with those "other arts" which, until now, a world unawakened to the great consciousness of commerce had supposed existed, fatuously, for their own sakes. There was to be one on literature, one on design, one on architecture, and if after this experiment it was discovered that they "pulled," one on music.

The first was simple enough. One need only to glance through the great masterpieces of English writing to discover what extraordinary ad-writers were wasted on motionless ages when business was a thing apart and there was no medium to bring this beauty into the lives of the common people. Now in a world-consciousness, instinct with the throb of industry and the thrilling surge of commerce, such expression could be applied, "its potential energy became intensely kinetic," it could be brought into hundreds of

thousands of homes, bearing on its wings the household gods, the little things that make life livable.

A man who could write:

> "O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been
> Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
> Tasting of Flora and the country green,
> Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth!"

and that superb bit of suggestion:

> "With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
> And purple-stainèd mouth . . ."

how such a man could have written for a beverage campaign, his words of beauty flashed in color from end to end of the world, spoken by the lips of children, household words!

And yet there were those who spoke of the desecration of art, commercialized! What better application of art than thus to link it with life! Art, wandering about in abstract thought accomplished nothing in this quick-moving, forward-looking, workaday world!

And so on. With the first day's work on this writing—which in its conclusion urged all writers to apply themselves to commerce, the soul of our modern civilization—Gail was heavily tired. Creation was a fatiguing business. Yet there was more than fatigue that dogged his homeward steps, something of that hurting, shaming sense, that revulsion, that is said to follow the satisfying of loveless passion.

Having expressed this not pleasing emotion in an hour of childlike irritability with Muriel, he sat long in his den, looking out through the long warm twilight into the valley that was concerning itself at the moment with the thrilling activity of budding. And, absorbed in this half-dazed contemplation, he grew, as one does often enough in the immediate presence of occupied nature which knows only truth, a little sickened at the presence of himself and crowding humanity about him.

He sat long thus, finally dropping asleep. He dreamed confusedly of a sky ablaze with letters that gyrated about into words: slogans, catchwords, great fiery sentences that descended upon him suddenly and withdrew to immense distances and faded out. "A skin like softest velvet" grew and stretched till it touched the two horizons, then waved thin and merged into "lather light as the foam of whitecaps."

When he woke the dawn was low and pale in the east with the arms of trees stark against it. There was a reverent hush on the valley, a sacred

meditation with all things bowed and humbled before the entering presence of the day. In the instant Gail felt suddenly cleansed and freshened as if God had touched him in the last moments of his sleep after the fading of his dreams; an exaltation came to him, he rose and stretched his arms out to the dawn, and threw back his head and laughed with the joy of it. Then he turned from the window and clenched his hands.

"Now I can write," he said.

And in the waxing of the morning he sat, his body twisted and taut, his soul suspended in agony, before the white paper that was to record his exaltation. When the day was definite and fancy blotted out by the straight beams of the sun, he read, tired and without emotion six uncertain lines of a poem:

> "In the pale splendor of a golden dawn
> When from the secret revel of the skies
> Before the solemn stars' inquiring eyes
> The hiding curtain of the night is drawn,
> A quiet wind comes freshening from the west
> To cleanse . . . . . breast."

Words to fill the last line marched in weary succession through his mind, but his hand hung motionless over it. Somewhere in the depths below an alarm-clock rang out. Gail threw down his pencil and got up, running his hand again and again through the shock of his hair.

"It's gone," he said. Sweat came on his body and he drew his hand across his cold, wet forehead. A little chill crept up his spine, up his neck, and ended in a sharp pain in the back of his head. He closed his eyes and little points of light danced before them.

"Gone! All that! Cleansing. Freshening. The west wind." He turned furiously to the desk covered with white sheets and sickening, stinking cigarette butts, and picked up the sheets and tore them violently across and across, and gathered the heap of tiny flakes and sifted them through his fingers. There was a sensuous pleasure in this sifting. The torn-up scraps of his life, sifting through his fingers, falling, indifferently, like snow.

The reek of stale smoke sickened him, and he turned from the desk.

"I'm tired," he said. "Tired. Tired of all this, tired of life. I wish God would kill me. If I could die now quietly among these bits of my wasted life! They would find me here. . . ."

Muriel, coming in a moment later, angry at his lateness to breakfast, found him where he had fainted by his desk.

XIX

A FIXED idea, once it has got its hold, does not readily abandon us. Even in our great dramatic moments, our emotional crises, it is there in our thought, seeming often petty and incongruous. Thus Muriel, overcome by fear at finding Gail white and motionless on the floor, thought first, not of him or his predicament, but of her fixed idea. Even when she had restored him to consciousness and so discovered that he was not indeed dead, it merely altered in form. Her first thought, which she would later have stoutly denied, was that the "other woman" had driven him to kill himself. Her second thought, when it appeared that he had only fainted, was that his long evenings, absent from her and therefore occupied in some sinister manner, had "sapped his strength."

A long sleep, a day or two of rest from the office, and Muriel's tender ministrations restored him in body, and the lassitude of his mind, reacting from its strain, induced forgetfulness. When he went back to the game it was with hope beginning again.

"I have lost the facility a bit," he said to himself. "When you don't work at writing it's hard to break back into it. I've let it go too long. But it will come. A little each day."

A little each night he worked at it in his den, dissimulating to Muriel. It did not come back. He wrote a poem, and after reading it aloud to himself, with careful modulation and emphasis and a slurring over the points where the thought did not naturally flow, decided it was good enough to send to Arkway for the *Hour Glass*. Arkway sent it back with a clipped advertisement of Vitapore pinned to it, and no other word.

Gail was deeply hurt by this bit of editorial brutality to which he was so unaccustomed and by the special sense of injury that associates itself with the act of a friend. After it he lay through a sleepless night, dully contemplating the hurt of it, and in the morning left for his office utterly unfit for the strain of enthusiasm that was his daily burden.

At noon after an unfruitful morning the chief sent for him. Mr. Outwater was unusually jubilant, his face warped out of its dignity by a mischievous smile that played about one side of it and drew down one of his eyelids in a prolonged wink.

"Got a new job for you to-day, my boy. What is it the poet says: 'In the spring a young man's fancy'? That's you to-day, Gail, my lad; married or not, I can catch it in your eye."

Whatever it was he caught in Gail's eye had no origin in his unhappy soul.

"Dangerous game, boy, you're going to play this time. Guess Mrs. Winbourne better not know about it, huh?"

A rising anger in Gail menaced the mask of his face. This unseemly comedy was not even part of the formula. But he said:

"Don't keep me in suspense, sir."

"Aha! I thought you'd be interested. Well, here it is. I've got a new client. What's the feminine of client? Aha, you get my drift! The trouble is she's damnably good-looking. Don't feaze *you*, eh? Oh, no, not you! I was a boy myself, remember! Runs a modisterie, or whatever you call 'em, on Fifth Avenue. Darcy. Madame Darcy. A leetle bit Fransay, I should say. H'm. Liable to fall for those eyes of yours, what? Well, nuff said. Enter Madame Darcy."

He touched a bell on the edge of his desk.

Almost instantly the door swung open, and Gail rose suddenly and awkwardly to his feet. The room grew suddenly warm and perfumed, and a little tripping person in a luxuriance of clothes precipitated herself upon them.

"Ah, monsieur, late, of course! But you know, cher monsieur, with ze traffique and ze signale and ze police, and ze truck, and ze, oh, je ne sais quoi, monsieur, it ees *vraiment impossible*. And, of course, my dear sir—of course—" she lowered her eyes a moment as if overwhelmed by the confusion of her thought, then throwing back her head and looking at Mr. Outwater out of half-closed eyes, far in the shadow of her hat, "of course—I am a woman! No? But as you say, you *Americains*, to beesnis. Is it not so? Ah!" She had turned suddenly and seen Gail, and, clasping her hands on her breast, she lowered her head and looked out at him under the brim of her hat with a little suggestion of fear in her remote black eyes. "Ah, we 'ave not been *introduit*, monsieur, the—what you say?—copy writaire, is it not so?"

Gail, under this barrage descending upon the fortifications of his gloom, smiled his mask smile, and admitted reluctantly that he was. His personality, however, made no response. For the first time since his new winning way with clients had raised him to the envied peak of representative, he fell down now before the female of the species. He was embarrassed, awkward, and uncomfortable, and this unpleasing combination of feeling reflected itself in

indifference. No part of him quickened under her feminine and Gallic assault. And Madame Darcy was undeceived by his steady smile.

"I am at your service, madame," he said, not changing his expression.

She drew back uneasily.

"Of course, monsieur is very occupied, is it not so? This busy world! A million affairs so much more important than my little shop. But it means so much to me, messieurs!"

"My dear madame," Mr. Outwater interpolated, with a steely look at Gail, "Mr. Winbourne's time is yours for as long as you may command it. I assure you that nothing would give us more pleasure than your esteemed patronage. Now, Mr. Winbourne has just told me that he has made arrangements for you to take lunch with him at Delmonico's——"

"Ah, monsieur, so too good! But lunch, monsieur! In full Fifth Avenue! Ah, but your customs, my dear sir, so different from ze French! In Paris, mon Dieu, lunch, par exemple, with a gentleman, it is not like that we do our businesses. Ah, 'ow free, 'ow frank, this brave *pays*. I adore it!"

At Delmonico's the head waiter met them with a bow and a greeting, calling Gail by name, and escorted them to a window table. Gail, deep in the struggle between his persisting thought and the duty to his client, failed to observe the slightly malicious curl of the head waiter's lip and the flicker of light in his eye. Nor was this faint distortion of his smiling face perceived when, a moment later in a far corner of the room, he appeared before the table at which Muriel sat alone, to press upon her a choice of sweets. For Muriel was, at the moment, engrossed in observing a new revelation of the widely revealing mirror before her.

"And the tart de cerise, Mrs. Winbourne? A *spécialité*!"

Even in his voice an ironic suggestion.

Gail, in his corner, was endeavoring to concentrate. It was difficult. The interested smile, the sympathetic upturned eyes from his head, partly bowed, these were automatic and did not deceive the woman opposite, whose French and feminine thought was, at all times, primarily upon sex, and indeed business is, too, a matter of sex, is it not so? And thus intent she perceived, with that subtle perception, the special gift of women of her race, that Gail's mind was, in no wise, upon her words, nor his attention upon herself. Strange how two women, sharing the special divine intuition that so immunes them to male logic, could so differently have interpreted his look at this instant. Yet, to do her justice, Muriel's interpreting was through distance and a mirror.

A climax of embarrassment arrived to Gail when, in a pause following a more than usually insistent "n'est ce pas?" he became aware that no word of her question had penetrated him.

"Monsieur is *un peu distrait*, no? Ah, but yes! You are perhaps in love? In the spring, you know! That I should try to break in upon such things! I am so much a stranger to your thoughts, me! Tell me, is it then, the love?"

"I am married," said Gail.

"Ah, then that is impossible!"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure! You were saying—that the element of sex appeal must be sufficiently veiled to escape the suggestion of vulgarity ——"

A peal of laughter rang out, and Madame Darcy put her hand on his arm.

"That was so long ago, my dear boy!"

Her laughter and her gesture had attracted cynically amused looks from near-by tables. A woman at the next table swept Madame Darcy from head to foot with one of the contemptuously appraising looks with which women in public places regard each other, and spoke to the man across her table, who was not, however, attending. Gail experienced a discomfort long absent from his daily business negotiations. He seemed, in the presence of this woman, to have dropped back into a shy boyhood.

"My dear boy," she was saying, with a little pressure on his arm, "you will not be angry with me. And we will not discuss the affairs again to-day. Oh, I am so fatigué with business! Always money, account, buy, sell, it is so boring. You will have a five-o'clock with me some time at my little shop. I have some absinthe delicious! My account, it is yours. When you no longer love you will make me a beautiful copy, is it not so? It is so good to talk with you beautiful, brave American boyees. And now you must go? But to see again, as we say in France!"

She had got up; her amazing clothes fell in rarely graceful lines, a veil dropped obscuring the remote pallor of her face, and a vague, warm fragrance moved subtly about her. She left Gail with a little pressure of his hand as it hung listless by his side, and walked with her amazing walk out the door.

"Perhaps you would have preferred the strawberries?" said the head waiter to Muriel. "They are excellent. The spring is surely arrived!"

Gail, regaining his office after his business luncheon with the Parisian modiste, did not regain his superior gloom nor the ethereal ponderings of the

morning. He was gay in his heart with a gaiety that lightly refused repression, and the warm afternoon was spent in fitful walkings to the west window, whence he contemplated the spring in pleasant torments with punctuation of relieving sighs and little smothered laughs, in the manner of many a wiser and elder person similarly afflicted.

Yet the humors of his heart, stirred up from their submerged depths, directed themselves not specifically toward an object; his mind, somewhat tipsy from their fragrant outpouring, was far from concentrated upon the cause of his altered mood (if, indeed, we may ascribe one), but held in its vision the abstract love. Now, this is a condition which sometimes exists; not, however, for long. The abstract love remains but little time in suspension, and it shortly crystallized for Gail according to the habit of his mind.

So, having loved but once, when the first meaningless intoxication had risen from him, his thought was of Muriel. She came, suddenly and definitely, into that interstice of his mind created by the interruption of another.

He saw her now (by that psychic trick so destructive of consecutive order) as she had been when first he had loved her: a new, unknown thrill in his life. He saw her in this back-flood of memory as she had stood, with mocking eyes, amid the full bloom of the Glenvil summer: young, awkward, with the quick passage of joy and pain over her face that turned toward the wind; waking to be loved; weeping to be comforted, dreaming long, young dreams of blue and vistaed future.

In this pleasing comfort of memory the afternoon passed into the glow of sunset, and in that long light time when, across the world, the day beckons softly to the night he was carried fast through the new-coloring country, home. Yet before, his thought had preceded him, run ahead into a transformed home, pricked out with welcoming lights, had seen a young figure tinged with the glory of the fading sun, running out across green spaces to their greeting, a child face lifted to his, eyes half-closed. . . .

The commuters' train jolted rudely to a stop. Gail walked up the flagged sidewalk and the gravel sidewalk, through the granite gates and up the crunching drive of his house and let himself in the front door. Up the flags he whistled, and up the gravel he indulged in little private smiles, and up the drive he thought. Inside the house he was struck suddenly with a cold loneliness. Yet his gaiety was still dominant. He sang out an old call that they had known in Glenvil. There was no answer. He called again, and somewhere up-stairs a door slammed.

Of the many devices by which human emotion is registered, perhaps the slammed door is the most adequate. It provides a gesture so interrupting, forbidding, arresting, humiliating, and likewise so satisfying to the slammer, that it is difficult to conceive the proper relations of civilized society without it.

Gail, however, was in no temper to be rebuffed in so simple a manner. The throw of his happy dreaming into this abrupt reverse incited him to a silly rage. He ran up-stairs seeking the innocent door which had become the medium of his hurt and threw it rudely open while Muriel had her hand on the key. She drew back, nursing an injured hand, and tears of pain and anger came flooding to her eyes.

"What right have you——"

"Has some one of your acquaintance a better one?"

Words not now employed for the first time. Muriel laughed that peculiarly humorless and ironic laugh not infrequently exercised by those who have entered upon the second stage of holy matrimony.

"May I ask the purport of that charming laugh?"

"I was slightly amused at the tone of your question. Coming from you, it was truly delightful."

Muriel's delight was not reflected, at the moment, in her appearance.

"Perhaps you will explain," Gail said.

"Perhaps that explanation should come from some one of your acquaintance."

The static foundation of abused innocence, upon which, to be effective, a conversation of such nature must properly be built, weakened somewhere within him. He found it impossible to continue, nor to maintain the level attitude of his eyes. Muriel, seizing upon this pause of weakness, attempted to drive home her thrust.

"Perhaps, mon cher garçon, madame will have something to say about your breaking so suddenly into the room of another lady. Perhaps——"

But at this point there occurred that revolt of primitive nature which so often interrupts the suavity of feminine sarcasm in its supreme moments. She turned and covered her face, and a silent agony of suppressed sobbing swept over her.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Don't ever touch me again!"

Gail turned her about, holding her forearms in a grip in which his anger suddenly went out.

"I want you to listen to me," he said, in the excess of calm that followed the outgoing of all emotion. "That woman you saw was a client. Outwater made me take her to lunch. She was French, very obviously. She made advances of a sort, as you know. I should think you—any woman could have seen my attitude toward them. She saw it fast enough. Now, listen to me. Are you going to let this folly of jealousy break all our happiness? Think what it means. Think of the past—Glenvil—that first summer——"

She had, however, broken from him. With a supreme violence she had thrown off his grasp. She had stopped listening at the point at which she desired to hear no more. At that point she had thrown him off, turned her back on him. Now she whirled swiftly, her hands clenched, her eyes blazing:

"Jealousy! Happiness! A client! Business—always business! The game! Your game! That's what stopped our happiness—long ago!"

And then arrived the supreme climax. How many times he had rehearsed the words in the agony of long, tossing nights! How many times pictured himself facing her in that final crisis! How many times clutched himself with the tears starting to his eyes and burning his throat, and forced down the words out of his hot, fevered mind! How many times sworn never to utter them—to stop them at his lips in that awful, menacing instant when all the stage was set for them, when silence hung awaiting them; to look long and fixedly in her eyes, and then to turn away from her with a little, cynical smile! How infinitely more dramatic this supreme restraint!

But now, in this high point of this living piece, he uttered them:

"The game! My game! Why am I in this game? Answer me that? Who put me there?"

And with its old trick his voice broke, making his utterance less than normally adequate. He turned and opened the door. Muriel stiffened and, with a control which no other exigency could have effected, said:

"Tell Mary I have a headache. I want nothing."

Thus, in life, the most dramatic crises are subordinated that the proprieties may be sustained.

Gail, achieving little deception by his statement to Mary, gained no more by eating nothing himself. Given a Mary of reasonably living perception, a husband starving himself from sympathy with his wife's headache becomes a highly illogical phenomenon.

In the evening he wandered through the unaccustomed underbrush and briers of the valley, taking a reckless pleasure in the tearing of his clothes and skin. The briers became symbols to him; he took childlike delight in the

pretense of ignoring them. Thus would he proceed through life until it had torn and shredded all his soul into oblivion.

Tired and scratched at last he came home and undressed in his room while the spring frogs strummed their opening bars—a sort of "till ready" repetition—in some forgotten pool. The sheets were cool to his hot, sore body. He felt himself bleeding from a dozen of the torn scratches of his skin, and exulted in this outpouring of his blood. Perhaps he had cut some vein and would bleed quietly to death during the slow march of the night, while the musical universe ignored him and the indifferent stars looked down. It pleased him to think of the blood, dropping red upon the white sheets. And in the midst of these thoughts his tired body took its toll of sleep.

It was late when he waked, nature having extorted heavy revenue; his first sense was of great soreness, yet with his memory of the source, not altogether unpleasant. Then with his consciousness of the sun's full flood, and its vague connotation of unusual lateness, he moved, sat upright, slowly disengaged himself from the bed. Stripping naked, he regarded himself in a long mirror. He was disappointed at the extent of his scars. Nor could he discover any record of them upon his bed. Engaged in this search while the sun struck, pleasantly warming, upon his back he caught sight of an envelope on the floor by the door.

It was addressed simply "Gail," in the round, juvenile handwriting of his wife. The name had an affectionate look, and sharply the memory came to him of her first use of it, back there in Glenvil on his hilltop. Yet an uneasiness stirred in him, growing out of the warmth of his heart and the warmth of his body, as a happy picture on a screen sometimes fades and grows into a sinister one. He tore the envelope rudely apart:

GAIL:

I have told Mary that a telegram has come from home and that I have gone to see my mother who is sick.

Mary! Her first thought!

She will take care of things for awhile, then you can make what arrangements you see fit.

It makes no difference where I have gone. You know why. That is sufficient. It must be clear to you as it is to me that we cannot go on this way. It would be hypocritical, and there isn't anything any more to keep us together. I can see that what you told me is true, that I have spoiled your life. Now you are free to do as you like.

Do not try to see me.

Gail turned the paper over dully, then smoothed it out on his knee and read it again. Then it appeared to him just as a piece of paper, very hard, solid, linen paper, rough-faced, with the weave of the cloth showing in it. He passed his hand over it and felt the texture of it. He crumpled it and it resisted the crumpling, creasing sharply. The corners of it hurt him. He spread the paper out on his knee and read it again.

He got up and went to the window. How green the grass was! Down there, close to the house where the winter covering of straw had just been swept away, a tulip was opening in the bare brown bed. At the foot of the lawn a forsythia bush had flowered overnight. He remembered Muriel had told him the blossoms always came before the leaves.

But why did they come at all? Why had that tulip gone right on about its business when there was nothing now for it to open for? These things should have died in the night with her going.

So she had gone. She had got tired of him and gone. It was natural, of course. But why? What was all this mysterious conflict about? What started it? A robin shouted profanely and pulled a long elastic worm out of the ground. Silly beast, with his chest sticking out in that important way. The thing must have started somehow. Everything begins. Or perhaps nothing begins. Perhaps everything has always been there. That tulip has always been in the world somewhere in some form. So this disagreement between Gail and Muriel had always existed in eternity! Yet it had not existed in the summer of their love when there had been no doubts. No, somewhere, it had begun.

Gail dressed and went down-stairs. Everything was just the same. All these things were hers. Even her fur coat hanging in the hall. She must come back to get these things. She would come back, of course.

He went into the dining-room without looking at Mary. Mary brought his cereal in the little brown Scotch bowl that Muriel had given him on his birthday. There was a legend round the edge of it: “Keep yer braith to cule yer parritch.”

They had laughed rather inordinately at that legend. Yet there was nothing very absurd or funny about it. For a long time he had laughed at things that were not in the least funny. He could remember much laughter, but he could not now remember anything that had seemed to him funny since—since——

Whenever Mary came in he whistled little tunes to himself, forgetting that it had not been his custom to whistle at breakfast. He busily fingered the full, thick, respectable newspaper, turning over page after page. . . .

XX

And Muriel? How veiled her little letter to Gail, written in the tense hours! Written in the tense hours when time had ceased in the restless pacing of the floor, in the fitful sobbing out of her deep hurt. How cold, there on the hard paper, so little reflective of pain! For thus do women, in this distorted age when expression is so tortuous, dissemble the primal feeling.

Had Gail seen her in this torment, seen her drawn face, heard her whispered, broken words . . . But we do not see these things. Manlike, we see the facts, the hard paper, the meaningless, restrained, black writing.

To break forever? To relinquish this home, that even now, in its little things, was a home; to go out into a doubting, questioning, talking world? To face cold faces, answer cold questions; to leave all that was warm and intimate here to die?

Perhaps all this dark suspicion had been a shadow, quick to fade in the broad, humorous sun that laughs at shadows. But there had been no sun. Clouded, always, by heavy clouds; by one heavy cloud.

But before the cloud? One had laughed. Perhaps one had not laughed enough. Perhaps all this thing had been easy with more of comedy. Back there in Glenvil life had come and gone lightly enough. Then marriage—a great step. She had made up her mind to settle down and be less "flyaway."

How seriously she had taken this "game" of his, turned off his funny stories about it! Then, one morning, because he had got interested in it and told her his first good news, they had talked in the old way for a little while, about dozens of cars and footmen in purple livery.

Perhaps this French person had been a client. She had put her hand on his arm. The French did that. Suppose she had been a client. What an unpardonable injustice she would have done him! She broke down, thinking of the cruelty of her injustice. Gail, simple, faithful boy—Gail, with his hair all mussed up and those absurd questioning eyes!

If he would only come in now, with his hair mussed up, and say some absurd thing about soap! Everything would be all right then. She would ask him to forgive, and he would forgive. But he never said absurd things about soap any more. Soap had become so important. And underwear. . . . Mr. Outwater. . . . That night! . . .

And then he had thrown that thing in her face—that cruel word about the game. Who had got him into the game? He had said that dreaded "I told you so" with his cynical leer. His face as he had said it came flashing before her. She could not forgive that. Never. Never?

Gail, in the commuters' train became immensely absorbed in a discussion about the lateness of the spring. Yet it was not a discussion, because his fellow commuter agreed with everything he said. They told each other perfectly true things, and agreed that they were true. Then they diverged when each began to talk about his own tulips. One of Gail's tulips had opened that morning.

In the office the other representatives told him a quantity of new stories, and he laughed loudly because it was important that he should show no difference. They were nowise funny. But he had learned the habit of knowing from the face of the raconteur when the point was coming, and laughing convulsively just ahead of it. He found now that he could do this without hearing the story at all. He had got the reputation in the office of having a great sense of humor.

There were intervals when he was alone with silence hanging about him. Sometimes, when the door had just closed, the echo of a remark he had made, or of his laugh remained with him. Was it he who had said that? Laughed? He sat trying to place himself in his surroundings. My desk, my chair, my papers, all my things. My glass paper-weight, with a photograph of kittens on it. My work, my career. But me?

He stood by the window and looked out over the city, watched the ships moving in the river, and one ship, gay with flags and little specks, that were laughing and crying, excited people, going out to sea. Moving ships, moving people. Why? Had tragedy closed in upon these people as it had closed on him? Would it one day close, throwing the world out of focus?

This, then, was tragedy. The thing they tried to make people play on the stage. Two people in conflict, a third person; words, looks, gestures, soft music; comic relief moving busily round, afraid of getting left out. That was the tragedy they made people play, and other people paid money to watch them, and cry over them, and laugh in the comic places that made the pain more poignant.

But this was real tragedy. How flat it would fall if they made people do what Muriel and he were doing, on a stage. Why, there wasn't even a comic relief! Life had little enough of that.

Once he had prayed, when some strange, prophetic shadow had flitted across his summer's day: "Oh, God help me to think the world and life are primarily funny." Very young and illusioned, then! Now not even relief, not even the flicker of comedy to make the pain more poignant. It was not even poignant, this dull, puzzling pain.

What should he do now? Go back and live in the ugly house, with Mary bringing his meals and looking at him? Go back and live with her things and her memory? Go back and trace over, step by step, their growing apart, their petty arguments, their separate rooms, their conventional dinners?

Such puzzled intervals of the day remained in his memory; outside these nothing. Between them numbed, mechanical functioning. Thus, in the midst of tragedy the mind finds and takes its own relief. At five o'clock consciousness came back sharply with the opening of his office door, and the appearance of the steely-eyed boy with papers.

"I knocked, sir. Before you go home——"

He laid two papers on the desk.

"Before I go home," Gail repeated.

Now he would go home. Five o'clock when the lights pricked out of darkening streets, and the mystery of night hung over the fading city. Thrilling time when he would go home. He drummed with his fingers on the sticky desk top while an old tune thrummed up and down his brain, insistently cadenced, beating, beating. He marked the emphatic beats with the heel of his hand. That was where the drums would come in. . . .

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

The boy was gone. Now he could go home. He got up and looked out over the city, out to the hazy place tinged gold in the sunset where the river was. Beyond that lay a green land where the slanting sun cast long shadows. He was free now. Nothing to bind him, hamper him, crowd him. Nothing but the game. Away up there a little airplane was writing "Lucky Strike" on the pale green of the sky, in words ten miles long. So big these American conceptions. A symbol of the Game. Nothing but that to hold him from freedom. One might throw it off. Then there would be nothing. Nothing at all left. Had he truly loved her?

God, but she was gone! Gone!

In the street he came on Arkway. Was it fate that precipitated Arkway on him in these incongruous instants; that abrupt, mocking destiny, making him stub his toe, as it were, in the moments of his deep seriousness, his tragic intenseness, while the world laughed its misplaced, vulgar, hysterical laugh?

"I was coming to see you," said Arkway.

“Oh!” said Gail.

“I’m sorry about that thing I sent. It was rotten. Being an editor does that, I suppose.”

“Thing you sent,” said Gail, the words uttering themselves like a machine that had been made, by levers, to speak.

“Yes, your poem.”

“Oh!” Far back, that poem.

“Come round to the club; it’ll be quiet in the old place.”

“No.”

Arkway looked at him an instant.

“You’re in trouble,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Not lost your job?” There was a light in his eyes.

“No.”

“Home?”

Why did he rush so straight to the point? There was in delicacy in this straight speaking. Gail was silent.

“Oh, Gail, I’m sorry. It’ll straighten out. Let’s go—perhaps you don’t want to talk.”

“I can’t. I can’t.”

Something would break shortly. Did things break? Or did life go on twanging the same string over and over into an eternity of monotonous sound?

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I sent that thing. I’m sorry I said what I said that day.”

What day? Oh, that day!

“No, I’m not sorry. Because I meant it. But I meant something I didn’t say. At least I meant——”

Expression failed him. Expression failed this person who dealt in expression, praised and damned it.

“I meant,” he went on, “something that cannot be said. It cannot be said except in old words, so old their meaning is faded. I meant that I wished you could have a vision. I don’t really believe in visions. But I meant, and still mean, that I wish something would happen to the focus of your eyes so that things would suddenly alter in size and shape, twist themselves about, and assume the sizes and shapes your brain intended them to have. I wish you would become conscious of a grand unfitness. I wish all the things that now

walk, dignified and upright, would begin to walk on their hands. Set faces begin to grimace."

Had Rideout, in his straight simplicity, said something into which this spiralling talk could be translated?

"Come round to the Anarchs, and we'll give you a drink and a limerick. But, no, I see you won't. God bless you, Gail, this business will come out right. Climb a hilltop and laugh at yourself in the valley. Good night!"

Gail turned east. At the corner of Park Avenue he stopped. Two pomeranian dogs, straining toward each other on their leashes, stretched across his way. Two girls holding them and laughing. He looked suddenly into the eyes of one of the girls and she drew back, the laugh dying from her face in fear at his look. Then, when he had passed, the echoes of their laughter rang down the street after him. Why did they laugh?

The city was getting ill-kempt. The administration was letting things go. They let the streets get so dirty with whirling papers and rubbish, and dust blowing in one's eyes. Here was that darkening borderland between the rich and the poor, the respectable and the disreputable, the decent and the slovenly. It was a gradual merging with more and more children.

It was irritating to see so many children. Nobody was looking after them. Somebody ought at least to keep their faces clean, and their underclothes pinned up, and their stockings from falling down. So many hundreds of dilapidated, disjointed children, running among the wheels of wagons, dodging out from cars, swarming in and out of the houses. Yet people went on having them, in their monotonous way. Why? Life was so crowded. On a door-step a boy and a girl were sitting, their arms round each other, looking into each other's faces. Their faces were plain, almost ugly. As Gail passed they became beautiful. They drew close and kissed. Some one laughed.

An elevated roared over his head drowning every sound but the insistent humming of a tune in his brain. A light, merry air it was, with sinister words born of bloodthirsty frenzy in the French Revolution. He shook his head, trying to shake it off.

There was a dead cat in the gutter and a child looking at it solemnly. He looked back at the child, thinking there must be some symbolism in this dread absorption, and not seeing where he was going, ran into some one. A sudden crude scent came up to him, and he looked into a painted face that leered out of thick red lips. A hand touched his, and a voice said "Darling." Then the voice laughed and the woman passed on, and Gail heard her laughter ringing down the street after him.

How insistent was that tune! Why had it come back to him now, so incongruously, with its ghastly, ominous words?

"Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira
Les aristocrats à la lanterne . . ."

It had nothing to do with his tragedy. There was no tragedy in these poor. Pain, grief, dulness, hunger, not tragedy. Not this strange, puzzling tragedy; perhaps there were tragedies behind the drawn curtains of those dark windows.

Yet they were all laughing at him; there, now, a boy looked suddenly up into his face and laughed. Why did they laugh? Two women looked out a window, nudged each other, laughed. Was he the comic relief stalking through their tragedies?

The sun had departed and the street grown gray and dull and cold. The children had stopped playing, and stood whispering in little groups. A street light sprang out through the thick hanging gray of the air, and the boy who had lit it slammed the door of the lamp-post and smiled at him as he passed.

Out of the gloom ahead a deep, lonely whistle spoke cynically. The river. Nothing ahead now but the river. A little empty square; beyond it an iron rail, and nothing, then, but the slow-moving ships. How large they looked, threatening, in the darkening haze, these ships going about their mysterious business.

He leaned against the rail and looked down into the swirling black water. A masonry wall went down, straight from where he stood. This was the edge of things; one step more and oblivion.

Oblivion. Forgetting. Silent, comforting depths. There would be a moment's gulping agony, sharp pain in the lungs, then delicious sinking with all of life moving like meaningless, flickering, vanishing pictures on a screen.

No one would care. Would Muriel care? When she came to identify him as he lay, still and cold, on the white slab? Tears in her eyes, pain in her drawn face?

And B. Minturn Outwater, and his high priests! A good copy man lost! Excitement in the office, a stenographer crying, people remembering the last things he had said, how he had talked about enthusiasm, the joy of living. People saying he had never looked better, laughed more heartily, than on that last day. People wondering, gossiping, the hint of trouble at home. B. Minturn denying and then wondering. People forgetting. His desk turned

over to Jenks. Jenks sitting in his chair and talking about basic merchandising policy. People forgetting. Ça ira!

But no one would laugh. There was nothing funny about death. There was nothing particularly funny about life. Try, oh, master playwrights, that twiddle the strings of our destinies, to bring on your comic relief, now! The string breaks in your hand, your clown drops, disjointed and lifeless, on the stage.

"Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira. . . ."

Now. He clutched the iron of the rail, cold in his wet hands. He could vault it easily. There was no one about to see him. There was nothing below but straight wall. Now. . . .

He placed his hands carefully on the rail and closed them round it firmly. A tug blew a short blast from its whistle, ending in a high treble as if in shame at its speaking. Lights, red and green, pricked out of the gray. Now. Ça ira! How abominable that repeating, drumming song! It would be drowned out by the rushing water past him as he sank. The far sound came to him of children laughing away down the street. Why did they laugh?

"Bring on your comic relief," he said aloud, and gripped the rail with sudden strength.

Then, unconsciously, his hands relaxed and dropped by his sides. Across the river a gigantic, flaring yellow sign leaped out of the dark. He looked at it an instant, thrilled by its color, then a twisted smile grew slowly over his face, and light came in his eyes.

He turned back from the river and faced the darkening city, his head down, hiding the smile that grew to laughter on his lips.

IT FLOATS, said the sign.

XXI

He turned back from the river and faced the darkening city. It swam before him. Swam through the tears of his laughing. Oh, excruciating thing! It floats! Oh, gorgeous night, convulsed lights, winking stars, rocking universe! Oh, grand, tumultuous, upside-down city!

He turned back from the river and walked, not entirely touching the pavement. The way before him weaved about. The lamp-posts bent away from him. Weaving, gyrating life ahead. Life, slapping its thigh at his approach. The world all full of mixed metaphors. Muriel. . . .

Oh, no, not Muriel solemn-faced and writing hard little quirks on white paper, in the face of this thing! Muriel pretending! He could write her a letter now. " 'It floats,' said the sign." No, Muriel could not resist that. Why, he could write her the most remarkable letter in the world! He knew where she was. Muriel, with her pretending. He could write— Yes, he could write! Not poems about the dawn! Up in Glenvil, where the undertaker sold eggs!

And B. Minturn Outwater? A pompous name. Pompous, dignified person, walking on his hands. Underwear models, walking on their hands!

He would go to the Anarchs now, and have a drink and a limerick. Arkway would still be there. There would be endless limericks now. There would be time for everything now. Such freedom is divorced from time.

He turned once to look again at the far sign, sharp now against the solid dark. Grim passers-by stared curiously at him, wondering vaguely that there was the material for a smile in that dull street, seeing only unwinking lights, remote, solemn stars; knowing not, in their dull semiconsciousness, that they, too, were walking on their hands.

Gail stood a moment at the edge of the street corner, then stepped blithely on as one who had crossed the threshold of freedom.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *You Too* by Roger Burlingame]