

# *Creeping Rails*

Arthur Stringer

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*Title:* Creeping Rails

*Date of first publication:* 1907

*Author:* Arthur Stringer (1875-1950)

*Date first posted:* Dec. 26, 2023

*Date last updated:* Dec. 26, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20231251

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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# CREEPING RAILS

By Arthur Stringer

## I

Through the open windows, where the long silk curtains stirred and swayed in the breeze, Charlotte Cranfill could hear the impatient pound and clatter of hoofs on the asphalt. It was Davis, the groom, she surmised, waiting with the horses.

Then the burr and drone of an automobile crept up to her out of the morning quietness of the Avenue below. It stopped under her windows, a door closed sharply, and then the burr and drone began again, and died away into space.

That, she knew, was her husband, off for the morning. The odor of burnt gasoline sifted in through the curtains. It was odious, like some odious incense to an equally odious god of unrest. From where Charlotte lay on her bank of pillows she reached out an impatient arm and swung back from her bed the heavy, pivoted shelf-tray. The movement was an outward symbol of her inner feeling; it took on the nature of a ritual unconsciously performed. For on the bed-tray still stood the remains of her too abundant breakfast, an unlovely confusion, now, of what had grown cold and sordid and repugnant to her. From childhood, she suddenly remembered, she had always pushed her plate away when she had finished; it was a habit of which no one had been able to break her.

But if only all of life's unlovely and exhausted things, she vaguely wished, could be swung as easily away! And for the second time her hesitating fingers took up the letter which she had saved out from her morning's mail.

Marcelle, her maid, tapped and entered noiselessly. In one hand she carried a tall vase of gray silver, from which branched a cluster of Bourbon

roses. Over her other arm hung a bottle-green riding-skirt.

“Davis is here, madame, with the horses.”

The young woman on the bank of damask had already run her blunt gold dagger along the edge of the envelope, and was unfolding the bulky pages of the letter. She looked up with unseeing eyes, her thoughts far away; the maid repeated the message.

“Then tell Davis to wait, please,” answered Charlotte abstractedly, as she smoothed out the pages on her indolently up-drawn knees, and then began to read her letter, word by word and page by page, with what seemed a predetermined care and deliberation.

She paused only once, to fling back the two heavy braids of brown-gold hair that hung over her shoulder and partly shadowed her intent face. Then the grave, gray eyes, that seemed almost a violet blue under the low-arched brow and the even darker, thickly-planted lashes, went on with their reading. If, from time to time, the finely curved lines of the almost too red mouth were touched from their abundant youthful buoyancy into a betrayal of half-disdainful and half-embittered revolt, the woman’s studious and wistfully unhappy face gave no other sign of her inward feeling.

“My darling child,” ran the letter, in an angular precision of script and line which, to the reading woman, seemed incongruously old-world and exacting and unbending, “my darling child, I could scarcely tell you, I think, how your letter startled and grieved me. We, my dear Charlotte, ‘who are old and wise and gray,’ have all gone through these fires which you think so new and strange and terribly your own. I want you to remember this, from the first. For I can see that you feel your predicament is something startlingly new and unparalleled. My child, it is as old as the ages. And out of my own life and experience I want to warn you—before it is too late. We plain old women of the world, we misunderstood old dowagers, whose most tragic battle seems a struggle against obesity and wrinkles—all of us still chew the cud of some old love. Because it’s encysted in fat now you mustn’t imagine the old blind arrowhead didn’t once sear. I mean that, after all, it’s the ashes of some great love and sorrow that make the grayness of our gray old heads. And if we don’t still *feel* and *know*, we can at least still remember. And thinking over your problem, dear Charlotte, I would still plead with you to stand to the last ditch. I do not speak of a mere worldly wisdom. Keep up appearances, at least. Act out your part; grin and bear it, I mean, until you can stand it no longer, for your own name’s sake. *That’s* where we women suffer so much. A good many things have changed since I was a girl, but

tongues are just as bitter and tears are just as salty as they were thirty years ago.

“As you know, I opposed this marriage of yours from the first. If you had been only a great, wild, headstrong, wilful girl, it would not have seemed so bad. But you were more than this. You were not only rebellious and reckless and unrestrained, impatient of every bond and tie, but you were, as well, a young and fresh, beautiful-bodied and imaginative-souled woman, the sort of woman that passion *has* to flutter about and break its wings on. Yet you wanted to be the Hunter, you, with that mad, emotional, insatiable soul-thirst of yours. But, as I say, you were a lovely woman, and that made you the Hunted. Men clustered around you, and followed you, and wheedled you, and flattered you, as they will every lovely girl; and more than one of them thought that all these fine audacities of mind of yours, which I think *you* took for some great courage of soul, were only a sort of loose-jointedness of thought and life. Some of them probably still think so.

“I always felt, when your mother pleaded with me, toward the last, to bend round with her and think better of this crazy match of yours with poor Stephen—for every weak man ought to have our pity—I always felt that she knew she would be leaving you soon. I think she longed to see you more stable—to be tied down and restrained. Feeling this way, she thought she was leaving Stephen safely hitched to you there, to ride at your heels like a drag-anchor in a storm, and through his very stolidity to keep you from drifting too, too far. She knew, dear, that you needed ballast. She scarcely realized, though, that you were your father’s daughter. You can’t remember him as I do. (He was the best loved of all my brothers, for all his heat of blood and what it cost.) But in you, so often, dear girl, I have seen him speak and act and live. The same impetuosity, the same riot of mood and energy and impulse, the same big hunger for the joy of living—I could see that you had all these things to fight against, to keep down. Even before your marriage I knew that a passably bad man was always a poor brake on the wheels of a passionate girl’s life.

“I saw you swing down into your box at the Empire last Thursday night—your frugal old auntie was in an orchestra chair with the Lindsay-Dewars—I watched you in your Gainsborough and your white Venetian, with that chin of yours in the air and those lips of yours so disdainfully curled, and I said to myself, ‘There is a girl who is going to feel the whip of life before she’s bridle-wise! There is a young lady, I take it, who is either going to bolt or be broken!’ For, my dear Lady Disdain, I could see through all your little play-acting of indifference. You will say it was odd, but at the moment I

remembered how you always insisted, when you were a tot, on throwing your olive-stones on the floor! And even now, after your growing-pains are all over and forgotten, you insist on making mistakes—none of them, I know, has been the one final and fatal mistake—and you have refused to see where you were wrong. You have been stubborn and hard-headed, you have set this sad old city agog with some of the mad things you have done, you have fought your mad little fight for freedom—and now that the chain begins to chafe and pinch you begin to cry out that you are the only woman who has suffered and declare that you'll have your liberty, whatever it costs, as though this sort of thing, my dear, were to be found by chasing it across country at breakneck speed in a Mercedes touring-car, instead of fusing it out in your own quiet little cambric-covered furnace of suffering!

“One thing you have, of course; and that in the end may save you much. I mean your good American sense of humor, which will be able to laugh and shatter the tragedy out of many a threatening moment. You are at least not one of those soft women, with the tears oozing out at the first sprinkling of sentimentality, like the juices out of a pineapple sprinkled with sugar.

“But what troubles and grieves me most, dear girl, is what you tell me about Stephen's brutality. That, as you say, is the most terrible part of it all. To strike a woman—oh, it is unspeakable! But to strike a woman before a servant—I can't write of it, dear. You did right to discharge that second butler. But husbands, my child, are not to be shifted off with an hour's notice and a handsome tip! Whether Stephen was drunk or not makes little difference. Even the halo of jealous rage can't beautify brutality like this. But then again, you see, it was doubly unfortunate that you should have this ridiculous and even dangerous music fellow, Dorat, playing Chopin to you alone in the moonlight. And when, at heart, you don't know a jot about music—when you only wanted to be lapped, if I'm not greatly mistaken, by some gentle little tide of emotionalism, to wash the everyday dust off. But there, I don't want to be the Devil's Advocate for anybody. I only want to open your eyes and make you see things. And when you get as old as I am, my dear Charlotte, you will be more humble, and perhaps ask less of the world, and, above all things, *less of men!*

“As I say, to have a hungry-eyed and long-haired musician playing Chopin to one's wife in the moonlight is not a soothing nightcap for any half-drunk husband. Then Stephen always was primary and rudimentary and kind of semi-barbaric, under all his Union Club veneer. I suppose he had heard as much as I have about this artful and much-advertised piano-player fellow from Paris. I *hate* these platform *poseurs!* You heard 'Lohengrin'

with him Monday night. You motored to Cedarhurst and back with him Tuesday afternoon. You and he tried your best to founder your two biggest horses, in the Park, most of Wednesday. All this, mark you, you did not tell me of in your letter. But you see I know it, just as everybody in our set knows it.

“What you did yesterday, and what you are to do today, I don’t know, as yet, but in time it will all be duly made note of and passed on and announced.

“Now, my dear child, if you *are* going to take the bit in your teeth and bolt, for good and all, never pick out a scatterpated Frenchman for a running-mate. I’m worldly-wise enough to know that! In the first place, I firmly suspect this Jean Dorat to be a good deal of an adventuring *poseur*, traveling on his face and seven inches of rusty red hair. If he is a big man, why doesn’t he do his work in a big way? Why doesn’t he take to the auditorium, where he belongs, like Ysaye, and Paderewski, and black little freckled Kubelik, instead of posing at pink teas and doing the shaded-window studio nonsense? I heard him at one of those drawing-room recitals of his, and watched a pack of emotional matinée-girls crowd round him and coo about their Over-Souls, and all that sort of marshmallowy rubbish. I even saw one of them produce a pair of scissors and when he was busy dilating on Music and The Infinite, deliberately cut a button off his sainted coat-tails—to sigh over in secret for a blissful three weeks. If I am wrong, and he *isn’t* a charlatan, then for heaven’s sake *do* steer clear of him. If he is an artist, I mean, it is foolishness to give or concede him anything. For the greater he really is, the more selfishly and dispassionately he will bend and warp everything round to his Art. I know them, my dear. Peace and home and women and love—they toss them all into the jaws of that ravenous monster they toil and die for. They’d break your heart, just to nocturnize placidly on what they’d call your delicious semi-tones of grief. They *have* to be selfish—and women who love them find it out, always, a little too late. No, not a Chopinite, my dear! It would be as silly as that old threat of yours about running off to go on the stage, where you’d vamoose in a week. For the stage, my dear, as we know it nowadays, is good-bye brains and long-live body! When *our* sort of people mix up in it they’re invariably stupid and vain; when the *other* sort do they do it for one of two grim things: to fall or to climb.

“I would never stop to take this thing seriously, only I have several reasons for suspecting that Dorat himself is trying to give some color of sincerity to his feeling. All New York knows of his attitudinizing over your

Salon portrait last Spring. Of course, my dear, it is always flattering and sometimes disconcerting to have a genius fall in love with one's picture, and even dedicate a sonata to it. But when it's not a supremely *good* sonata it might all look a little *outré*, especially to jealous-minded husbands. And you, my dear, were made strictly for home consumption!

"I often wonder, Charlotte, if you fully realize just how far you have defied the conventions. And have you stopped to think whether or not you can keep it up? Or have you considered where it leads to, and what is the end of it all? Are you going to make this young life of yours like that old room of yours, at home, that poor old room I used to look over and laugh at, for there you were, writ down with all your moods and fads and caprices; with all your comically-tragic variable temperament—Chinese lacquer-work higgledy-piggledy with Tuscan vases, and Daghestan tapestry next to Navajo blankets, a dusty music-stand cheek-by-jowl with a forgotten easel, a portfolio of bad poetry hobnobbing with a set of book-binder's tools, and Mexican drawn-work buried under a mess of modeling clay. This passion for change, this unrest and waywardness, we can always overlook in the mere play of life. But in the deeper currents of love and duty, my child, it leads to bitterness and utter defeat. As I told you years ago, it's not more life you want, it's more Light. You have not the stoic and self-fortifying soul of a social derelict; you could never be a maverick on the range of respectability. There is none of the Hindu pariah about you. You are a girl of warmth and fire; you have to have friendship, companionship, perfect understanding. You are big-hearted and quick-teared; you are luxury-loving—through habit more than through temperament—and you are Love-loving.

"You have been saying to yourself, I know, that you want to live your own life. But it is only we 'who are old and wise and gray,' dear Charlotte, who learn that, after all, the fiercest slavery can and does lie in excess of liberty. Beyond the sea-line of every new view there always lies another golden island for us to sigh after, beyond the frontier of each new passion there stretches another strange land to tempt and call us. You have asked too much of life. You want everything absolute, when, after all, existence is made up of compromises. You are like the old Irish volunteer your Uncle Gregory used to tell about, who kept insisting the whole blissid rigimint was out av stip wid him . . . For this reason, and for many others, I say cling to your wreck until you utterly have to abandon it—cling to it until the last bitter moment. Put up with Stephen to the uttermost; I mean if you can—and heaven be thanked you have your own home and your own money. Busy yourself, above all things. I'd rather see you tubbing a baby than scraping a palette—but take the palette if it's the best you can get! Take up your



painting again; wiser persons than I have said you could do something at it, if you only tried. The deeper moral side of it all, the commands of our church, you see, I have not touched on—for I know you are still too much of a pagan, in your heart of hearts, to give an ear to what I might say. Some day you will understand.

“Think these things over, and write and tell me how you feel about them. I have been used to giving you advice, dear Charlotte, from the day you first flooded the bath-room and painted the tom-cat with strawberry juice, right down to the time you indignantly packed up to march off alone to the Continent. But none of it, I think, was more needed than it is now. So forgive me, dear child, for flinging such a letter at you. It is only because I love you so much, because we all love you and hope and pray for your happiness.”

Then followed the signature, in the old-world, angular handwriting, “Your fond and affectionate, Aunt Agatha.”

The woman on the bank of pillows slowly folded the letter, sat with wide and studious eyes for many minutes, and replaced the sheets in the envelope.

Then her gaze wandered to the bed-tray, with its disordered array of cold dishes.

All life seemed a thing of parings and husks to her, at the moment. There was nothing she looked for, there was nothing she needed, now, but escape. That, at least, in some form or another, was still open to her. Yes, she had everything, it was bitterly true—but, then, had she not surrendered everything for it?

The restive stamping of the horse-hoofs on the hard asphalt crept up to her ears.

“Marcelle,” she called sharply, as her lithe young body slipped out of its sheathing linen, and the two great braided ropes of her heavy hair were caught up in an impatient hand.

“Yes, madame,” answered the maid, from the doorway.

“Bring my riding-boots, and the rest of the habit,” she said, fired with a sudden hunger to get out into the open and think it all out, from the first to the last.

“My dear Aunt Agatha,” wrote Charlotte Cranfill, in answer to the letter which had caused her a morning of hard riding and an afternoon of much unrest and troubled thought, “your letter made me truly happy, and truly miserable. Nothing sudden and terrible is going to take place. I am not trembling on the brink of some great abyss—and that is the worst of it all! I will just go round and round like a pin-wheel, I suppose, until I burn out. Everything will drag dully on and on and on, as it has done now for nearly two years, and it will all be mean and small and sordid. I feel now, as you once told me, that life today doesn’t have so many Great Moments as it used to. It was all flashing and fine, once, when the man drew out his sword, and, heigho! made history and faced destiny in a moment’s action. Now, instead of drawing out swords, our lawyers draw up briefs, and some cumbersome machinery is set in motion, and things drag on and on, and there is neither movement nor climax to it all.

“That is just what I feel is killing me. I, too, must still have something barbaric and primal about me. I want action. I hate the dull suspense and the gray evenness of these things. I tell you, Aunt Agatha, *I want to live!* I want to do something. I have got to get out of myself. I don’t think I am one of those ultra-modern, self-opinionated Shawese women longing to reconstruct the moral world, to the popping of smart epigrams. All I want is a little love and a little tenderness and a little companionship. Day by day I seem to be getting more cramped and starved and crushed—some mornings I feel that I could scream out loud, like a crazy woman, and throw the cups and sugar-bowl at the walls. I don’t mind suffering; I’m not afraid of sorrow—if only it’s *for* something, if only it’s got stir and movement and meaning to it.

“Women are not the same, Aunt Agatha. I *know* they’re not! Some of them would give their eyes to have what I’ve got—just to have money, to upholster existence for them, and just to have teas and cotillions and that sort of vapidity, even to pad out the bony skeleton of their Tragedy. I’m growing sick and tired of it all, and I tell you seriously, Aunt Agatha, *some day I’m going to take out of life what it still owes me!* ‘I’m going to have my fling,’ as Stephen once put it. And speaking of Stephen, it is not so much his brutality (if only he’d not exercise it before the servants!) as it is his whining cant about affection. As I told you, he knocks me down on the stair-landing, like a German butcher, and puts a scar on my forehead that will stay with me for life, and then gets white and sick over it, and bawls like a baby in his misery, and groans that I am his wife, and that he can’t help loving me, and that I am breaking his heart (just after he has done his best to break my head!). And then his mother, too, comes to me, and pleads for him, and

weeps, and talks about her poor, undisciplined boy, and how he has been spoiled from a baby, and how unhappy it is all making her.

“This is what makes it hard. It leaves me without justification. I can’t trump up excuses for myself; I feel like Hamlet, when he found his uncle on his knees, praying. But something must soon be done. I don’t see how things can possibly keep on and on as they have been doing. I want a change. A broken head and then a bawling husband!—even such a fine rotation of crops as this can’t stop the soil of matrimony from getting worn out. And when I want a thing I want it. When I live I want to live. When I love I’ve got to love—everything must go with it, everything must be taken and given. You remember what Uncle Ezra used to say, ‘When a New Englander goes wrong, clear the track!’ It must be that way with poor papa and me—behold in us the Tragedy of the Variable Temperament!

“You will say that I *have* everything. That is quite true. When I get tired of the brougham I can try the victoria. When the victoria palls I can go forth in state in the motor-car, and then the spider-phaeton or the runabout, and then the next day back to the brougham again. If I don’t go to the Sturtevant’s I can go to the Fish’s or the Carlton-Harrisons’, and if I don’t like dinners I can go to dances, and if the dances are tiresome, I can go to the Metropolitan and sit up in a box (and have good music make me doubly miserable!). But what has all this got to do *with living*? If I had not rounded the familiar old circle so often—if it was my first season instead of my fifth, then I might learn to endure it.

“Oh, Aunt Agatha, often and often I wish I didn’t have a dollar! I wish I were dog-poor. Then I’d get a shabby little studio in the shabbiest little corner of all Washington Square, and go hungry and be lonely and work hard—and perhaps, in the end, do something that would make me think I had broken into life. No, no; I can’t try to paint either here or at Cedarhurst—the servants and the fuss, the machinery of the life crushes it all out of me. I’d only do Nile-green poster-girls floating through atribilious marines! Not that I’m morbidly ill or unhealthy (you should have heard me singing at my bath yesterday morning!)—for I’m not. I sleep soundly and eat well, I walk and ride hard. I try to keep this ‘temple of the body’ firm and fresh and sane. I’m still young, as women go—in fact, there are days when I feel that all life lies before me, and I have a girlish and virginal sort of wonder as to its possibilities and its joys and sorrows.

“Do you remember, five years ago, you warned me that some day a strong man would take me in hand, and break me and tame me! I resented it then: but now I seem to *want* to be broken and tamed. Do you know the

feeling, Aunt Agatha? As you say, I have always been breaking out, and causing trouble. It occurred to me, today, that I'm a good deal like poor Algie Eaton with his weak lung. He feeds and nurses himself and makes blood, until he is just so full of it, and then it bursts out again through the poor weak partition, and he goes down again, and then he starts slowly building up still more, only to break out again. I get too much blood in me, I feel, sometimes. I have no way of working it off, and so it just breaks out in caprice, and freakishness, and silliness, and I wake up and realize that I have shocked people.

“As you tell me, my dear old aunty, in your discreet way, some of them still think I am a good deal of a fool. And yet you tell me to wait, and hesitate, and see how things will come out—when you know I never could wait, and never would endure uncertainty! And yet—and yet—it is not always a man, Aunt Agatha, that breaks and tames a woman.

“You are wrong in your impressions about Jean Dorat. He is not a charlatan and *poseur*, and I am not in love with him. No, I do not love him; but I like him. He seems so alone in the world, so isolated, so in need of companionship. He drops in often, of an afternoon and takes tea with me. But it's not me he comes for altogether. I think it's more for my hickory fire and Golden Pekoe, and of course, when I remember how he has been run after, I'm human enough to feel honored. For, notwithstanding all you say, he is a great artist, and even, I believe, a genius. He has not been successful, it is true, I mean not successful as a man of his gifts ought to be. He is not known as your Ysaye and Paderewski and your little freckled boy from Bohemia. That is because he has not yet had one of the big commercial managers behind him, to pound him into publicity and scatter romantic tales of his youth broadcast into the papers, to have him endorse soaps and hair vigors and nerve tonics, to have him sent out on a big concert tour and fill windows with his lithographs. But this is what *is* to happen to him, and it is to begin in a month or two. Then we shall see—what we shall see. You remember what the Comtesse Potocka said about Paderewski and his first concert?—well, I think it will be a repetition of that. But Dorat is no business manager. I had a talk, first with Steibler, and then with the two Freihams, myself, and Steibler is drawing up a contract already. Poor, impractical fellow, he brings it to me, day by day (I mean Dorat), to read over and endorse and amend—to me, who know no more about business than he does himself! But he is nervous, as flickering and flashing as a torch-flame, and he suffers terribly on the platform. This caused him to come down with a crash, two seasons ago, in Vienna—I believe they still smile over the failure, on the Continent. That is why he is now looking to

America for his first real recognition, I think. And as for work—you cannot dream how hard he works. Women may come and coo around him, as you say, but this really is nothing to him. And if our own men in America are too busy making money, why should anybody object because we import our supply of Companionable Souls? Our decent men keep their noses in a stock-ticker all day. It is only the silly boys and the imbeciles that are left for us to play with.

“You are also wrong, dear Aunt Agatha, in saying that Dorat is a Frenchman. He was really born in Canada, in the little Canton of Chambly, not far from Montreal. His father was an Irish lock-tender. His mother was a French-Canadian singing-woman (she starred for a year or two as a Polish contralto), who took him to Paris, ran away with a man there, and left her boy to starve in the top of a dirty *pension*. That is all I know about him, except that he once drove a canal horse, as a child, at Lachine, that he worked in a piano-factory in London, as a youth, for three years, and that his life has been a terrible struggle—that he has suffered and been a great deal alone, and that when you once scratch through the Parisian varnish on him he is a tender-hearted and great-souled human being, a good bit of a baby, a little bit of a boy and a great deal of a genius.

“I don’t know why I have told you all this. But I have written it, you see, and while I am at it I may as well tell you something else. Dorat is to spend a week at Cedarhurst. It was unforeseen—and of course it’s doubly unfortunate—that Stephen is packing off to the Maine woods today. That will once more give people a chance to talk, as you tell me they do. That’s why I want you to be there with me, for the whole week. Then we can talk things out, too.

“But things will go on in the same old way, my dear Aunt Agatha, and the humdrum of life will continue, and I will still stick to my forlorn last ditch, I suppose—for I am more of a coward than you think I am—and I’ll wake up some morning and find a wrinkle and a white hair or two and talk about the What-Might-Have-Been!

“To all of this I say *perhaps*; for there are moments and moods when I grow almost desperate, when I feel that I can’t surrender without one last struggle for the joy of living! Like all young girls, I once thought love meant everything. Now I know that fluffy meringue can have a sadly heavy undercrust! There may always be, as you say, some ultimate island of illusion. Beyond the skyline there may always be some further land of hope. Yet even though we never reach it, even though we fail miserably, it seems to me *that the sail ought to be worth something!*

“Women are so different, Aunt Agatha! The older I grow the more I see and feel this. It is easy for some of them to be satisfied and happy. It is easy for some of them to be submerged and sacrificed and self-effaced. I suppose it is the eternal egoist in me—but I am hungry for something and don’t really know what it is. But oh, I want to live! You advise me to keep on, in the hope that some day contentment will fall in my hand—that I may yet cheat life out of its happiness, just as we girls used to twist and twist at a button on a West Point boy’s coat while we danced with him, until it came off and we carried it away for a hat-pin head!

“Even though, in some way, I must pay for it in the end, I want to be happy, absolutely happy, just once! Perhaps, at the last, I can save myself with some sort of moral jiu-jitsu. You once told me that when people are really happy, or really in love, they don’t talk and psychologize about it! That reassures me that I haven’t yet had my day, for, as you know, I have always been probing and weighing and testing. And where has it brought me? Or what has it brought me? It must be good just to close one’s eyes, and let everything fall away, and drift and drift, without knowing or caring. There, Aunt Agatha, I see the hair of your righteous old head standing straight up. Your Lottie of yesterday will never do what your Charlotte of today need blush for—though I remember that this Miss Lottie was always somewhat of a shameless young wench. Writing this letter has helped me—but reading your letter has helped me still more. Remember that I love you, that I always did, and that I shall think often and deeply over what you have said.”

Then followed the signature, and a page or two of postscript, and still another and a more disconcertingly affectionate farewell. And on the foot of the last page was appended a second postscript:

“From all this smoke, dear Aunt Agatha, don’t imagine that I’ve collapsed! I’m still serenely afloat—only, like most of the airships, *I’m not dirigible!*”

### III

Charlotte wondered, as she sat in the shimmering little dog-cart at Cedarhurst Station, just why the popular novelists had never essayed the epic of the Arriving Train. So many of the intenser moments of life, she argued with herself as she mused there with her ribboned whip aslant, came and went with the coming and going of car-wheels. So often, on narrow little

station platforms, life crowded up to its most purposeful apex, to its most poignant sense of loss or gain. So often the step across some Great Divide of existence was only the step to or from a waiting train. So often, in modern life, the climacteric seconds came between the momentary stopping and the starting of a locomotive—the meetings and partings, the joys and heart-aches, the hopes and tears, the awakenings and regrets!

And as she circled out on the cinder drive crowded with tilburys and traps and grooms and touring-cars and went flashing homeward along the undulating country road, she tried to convey some shadow of the fleeting sentiment to Mrs. Shotwell, who sat at her side.

“My dear,” answered her worldly-wise Aunt Agatha inappositely, studying her face, “I wish you were going on a trip, a long trip!”

“So do I—almost!” said the young married woman, who looked so like a girl in the slanting afternoon sunlight. Then she suddenly turned to the older woman at her side. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that you ought to have a change.”

“That I ought to go abroad and get so much rocky *wagon-lit* and bad hotel and olive-oil cookery and sulky *portier* that I’d get shaken out of myself? Oh, I know, Aunt Agatha; I know! Life is made so easy for a rich American girl! It always plays with the soft pedal on; it’s so screened and muffled and rosy! She’s petted by maids and nurses; she’s pampered by grooms and coachmen; she’s smiled on and run after by florists and dressmakers and jewelers; she has indulgent servants and attendants to wait on her every mood and caprice! You’d think boarding-school would waken her up a bit, but even there, when she is wealthy, and perhaps happens to be pretty, she’s discreetly cajoled and wheedled and given her own way. She floats through her youth waylaid with remembering smiles—and she thinks all this is life, bare life!”

“And she finds out her mistake when she marries a man about as beautifully indulged and spoiled as herself! It seems to me, my dear, that if there were more spankings in the nursery nowadays, there would be less scandals in the divorce court!”

The younger woman laughed, and looked ahead with a careless little flick of the whip.

“You mean a parent’s hand is really not so hard as Fate’s?”

“One hurts, my dear—but *the other usually crushes!*”

Charlotte suddenly paused to ask herself, as she made her toilette for the second time that afternoon, why she should be taking such pains with herself, why she studied her own face in the cheval mirror so long, and tried three different flowers in her hair.

Then she heard the rattle of carriage wheels along the gravel driveway that curled and twisted down to the great iron gates. She looked out. Yet even as she felt a wayward flutter of her heart a little burst of laughter broke from her lips. The brougham was a diminutive one, and Peterson, on the box, looked so wide and rotund, so ponderous and florid, that she pensively recalled what Dickie Sewall had said about her servants and dogs always growing so shamelessly fat. Peterson spoilt the turnout; there was no doubt of that. But she could no more have discharged the innocent and obese Peterson than she could have whipped away her over-fed Pomeranian.

Even Wilson, the old butler, who came to announce in his grandest manner the arrival of Monsieur Dorat, was a further proof of her irresolute will in all such things. In his *crêpe* dress-livery he always looked to her like a very wind-tossed crow, solemn and gaunt and guarded. In his morning-suit he looked like an undertaker in a lean year. And at all times he was addicted to unauthorized visits to the wine-cellar. Yet she was perversely and untowardly fond of that lean and funereal figure in solemn black. She seemed to have grown up from babyhood in its melancholy shadow—and she had a weakness for old things and old ways, she often told herself. Even now she detected a symptom of incipient intoxication in Wilson's unbending stiffness of neck, in his unusual haughtiness of manner.

She turned aside to hide her little bubble of laughter, for though Wilson would unhesitatingly make away with her sauterne and claret, she in some way felt that he would as unhesitatingly shed his poor old servile and irresponsible life-blood for her. She looked at him, where he swayed unsteadily before her.

“Tell Mr. Dorat to come to the White Room,” she said.

“Thank you, madam!” said Wilson gratefully. Then he stopped, and bracing himself against a chair-back, accentuated his gratitude by a profound and most ceremonial bow. But the woman did not laugh until he had disappeared below stairs.

She waited, in her own sitting-room, a room all white and gold and the palest of pale blues, where the long French windows opened out on a veranda muffled in wistaria, studded with Vilona palms and tubbed rhododendrons. About the great white pillars twined and clung the broad



leaves of the trumpet-plant, and far out, past the soft green lawns, with their pines and oaks and copper beeches, the gray-blue stretch of the Hudson glimmered and sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. Beyond that again lay the serrated purple hamlets of the Jersey shore, and still further to the west the black shoulders of a line of hills.

Charlotte could hear the low murmur of speech, and the foreign tones of Dorat's crisply languid voice. Then she heard the sound of steps crossing the old-fashioned marble hall, dying away on the heavily carpeted staircase. She wondered if it was his youthful years in London that had given him such easy mastery of English. She recalled their laughter over his friend Meran's slip of the tongue: the grim old painter, excusing his weakness for postprandial candy, had said to them in English, "*Eh bien*, I have such a sweet-mouth!"

Charlotte wondered at the new mood of mingled lethargy and unrest that was creeping over her. For a vague shyness had stolen into the waiting woman's breast, a shyness that startled and oppressed her.

Wilson, solemnly advancing to announce the visitor, all but fell over a chair. He was on the point of solemnly begging the begilded article of furniture's pardon, when he caught his mistress's eye, and discreetly and precipitately retired.

"Wilson is drunk again," she explained, with her flashlight of a smile, as she gave her hand to her friend. Somewhere in life's purest moment, she felt, there would always dwell a little flaw.

"Am I not lucky, to find you, and in such a home!" he said, in his low, even, unmoved manner. Then he took her hand in his, and bent and kissed it.

"I *hate* posing!" she said, almost angrily.

"What have I done?" he demanded, in bewilderment.

"Why be so Parisian?" she heard her lips reproving him, with perfect coldness. A handshake, she felt, was sufficient.

He shook his head of russet-red hair with whimsical impatience, and looked at her, musingly, out of his unbetraying brown eyes. She remembered, guiltily, that she had once scoffingly said they were like a mastiff's.

"And why be so American?" he in turn asked.

"I allow nothing to be said against my country," she said sternly back at him. And the ice was broken and she was herself again.

“Don’t you miss your Masque de Fer, Forain, Caran d’Ache, the babble and the bubble of the boulevards?” she asked him casually.

No, he was happy, he responded, if he could see her. She was going to have tea served, she told him, out on the veranda, in the open air. He held the curtain for her, with his Continental courtliness of gesture, and then came and stood beside her in the wistaria-filtered sunlight. She thought of the lad on the Lachine canal, and wondered if he acquired it, this easy theatricality of attitude, with much study.

“It is fine,” he said, with his eyes on the river and the hills. “I have often wished that it could be in spots like this, and not in pens of boards and bricks, that we had to meet audiences. For instance, think of the *Lieder ohne Worte* with this background, or some of the *Caprices* in this setting! You see, it is all Mendelssohnian!”

“Yes, Mendelssohnian,” she echoed, though her eviscerating American humor brought to her mind the phrase of the shoemaker to his last. She liked him best, she felt, when he did not talk music.

Then she added, “At the other side of the house I have my garden, my dear, old-fashioned garden of thyme and lavender and rosemary. They wanted to modernize it, when we took the place, for it goes back to Colonial days. But I forbade it. Now, I suppose, it will make me think of Leipziger Strasse—Number Two, was it not?”

He looked at her, in mild bewilderment. She caught the glint of comradeship found and known, and delighted in it.

“There is so much of the garden in Mendelssohn’s music, don’t you think?” he asked her, more intimately.

She said only “Yes,” for a maid was spreading the tea-table behind them, and she wondered if, after all, he would always seem the artist before the man to her.

“Mendelssohn’s music,” he went on, with his scholarly, grave abstraction, “is the music of externals, of exquisite externals. It always breathes of flowers and winds and waters, of light and color. It’s butterfly music, most of it, as delicate as moth-wings, with its softness, its love, so pure and young and innocent, the love of a Cecille. When in the mood, it is enough. But there are times when this is not satisfying—times, I mean, when we want more than this.”

“Why more?” she asked, with her eyes on the far line of shouldering hills.

“Because life holds another note; the music, for instance, so comprehensible, so tragic, so passionate and real, of Chopin, during and after the George Sand episode!”

She gazed at him steadily for a moment or two. During that interval of silence the wind moved softly in the tree-tops, and the leaves of the wistaria stirred languidly.

“The love that was Chopin’s for the faithless Constantia, the love that inspired the second movement of the F-minor concerto (not the E-minor, as so many suppose), was very different from that George Sand love.”

“Then you regard the women of the Cecille type as—as unprofitable?” she asked.

“No, no; as too divine, perhaps. See what a beautiful figure she stands in history, this beautiful wife of Mendelssohn!”

“A trifle prettier than Daniel Sterne or George Sand!” She could not help seeing his wince.

“You learned that,” retorted Dorat quickly, “along with your daily golden text in the *Sacré Cœur*! But then, see; *her* art influence was nothing compared to George Sand’s!”

“Then you *do* put art before everything?”

“Yes, before everything,” he answered slowly. The definitive precision of his tone stung and aroused her.

“But what can a base love do for art?” she demanded hotly.

He held up a hand reprovably. Then he came and stood over her; she felt a resentment for some sense of mastery in his attitude.

“A base love!—there is no such thing as a base love. Love is love, and in itself excuses and uplifts everything.”

“‘Love rooted in dishonor is not love!’ ” she quoted back at him.

He looked at her steadily, with the sunlight on his face, and it came over her suddenly that it was more than strange that he and she, a man and a woman, should stand under the quiet leaves in the quiet Autumn afternoon, speaking so quietly of love. And it was at that juncture that she remembered to call Mrs. Shotwell.

That feeling stayed with her for the rest of the day, and through all the evening, as they talked and idled away the hours.

When he came to say good night to her he took both her hands in his own.

“I still, you see, am not an American!”

He stooped to the strong yet fragile fingers, and kissed them. And as he did so some new current of consciousness seemed to creep and tingle through Charlotte’s being, for she stood there with widened eyes, looking after him as he went. They had both known much loneliness, she felt.

And that was the end of the first day.

#### IV

“Look; they are sea-gulls!” said Mrs. Shotwell, loitering on the terrace with Charlotte and Dorat. She pointed high over the river with her green silk parasol. “And that means bad weather!”

“What are they doing, I wonder, so far away from the sea?” mused Charlotte aloud.

“They are like love, madame, which belongs to the Deeps, and yet forever seeks out the shallows!” was Dorat’s answer.

The eyes of the man and the younger woman met. His speech had been made with the candor and openness of a child. There was nothing circuitous or self-conscious in his smile. But the older woman put up her parasol with a snap, and turned on her heel. And for reasons it would be hard to explain Charlotte flushed crimson, as her Aunt Agatha walked away.

During his stay at Cedarhurst Dorat had promised to practise from eight until one, each day, in the music-room. Yet on this, the first morning, he had pleaded that he was not in the mood for it. Even to try, he explained, would be a waste of time. A day of idling would get the grit of New York out of his soul. “And that song-sparrow on the copper-beech there is making better music than all of us!”

She suddenly asked him if he would come and see the stables. They were the pride and talk of the countryside, those Cedarhurst stables of hers; and she liked him best when he was farthest away from the subject of music.

“I hate horses!” he told her frankly.

“But you ride!”

He laughed a little.

“I rode for seven years, from the time I was that high!” He held his hand within a foot or two of the terrace-turf. “On my coat-of-arms, some day, I am going to put a canal horse, *rampant!*”

She felt most drawn to him when he was most honest. She tried to picture him a sandy-headed boy among river-drivers and boatmen, as an impatient and moody fiddler at *habitant* country dances. Her efforts ended in a vague pity for what he had struggled against and endured.

So, instead of going to the stables, they spent the morning rambling about the grounds. It was bright and limpid Indian Summer weather; and side by side they wandered aimlessly about in the sunlight, careless of time and place, abandoned to the quiet and indolent dreaminess of their surroundings.

She led him to her old-fashioned garden, down the prim, narrow little paths, wistfully showing him the remnants of all her Summer roses.

Under the shadow of the old garden wall she stooped and gathered some belated lilies-of-the-valley.

“They flowered late, you see,” he mourned in his childlike sincerity again, “because they had no sun.”

As she stood before him in the brilliant, blinding light, hatless, with the wealth of her hair a little loosened and tumbled, like a crown awry, Dorat knew that he had never before seen a face so beautiful. At one moment it seemed the beauty of the girl, with the lithe young pulsing body, so brimming with vitality, so alert of movement, so tensely knit, so Aprilian in its freshness of tint and color. Then, at another moment, it seemed to him the fuller and maturer beauty of the woman, teeming with her more abundant warmth, mellowed into some wistful quietness, shadowy, alluring, full of muffled silences and languid movements.

She came to him, smiling quietly, and made a little spray of the flowers she had gathered.

“Let me decorate the King!” she said, as she reached up and thrust the green stems into the button-hole of his coat-lapel.

He looked at her laughing face for a moment. She had no thought of drawing away. He took her hand, and held it in his; she scarcely knew why.

They stood there, looking into each other’s eyes, silently, scarcely wondering what wing, what shadow of something vast and pregnant and

ominous, was hanging over them. The garden about her seemed almost Edenic in its tranquillity.

“What is it?” she asked, almost in a whisper; for she had seen the sudden change that crept into his look.

She turned her head sharply. There, midway in the prim little path, with the open gate behind him, stood Wilson, in his solemn black. To Charlotte’s startled eyes he seemed the somber figure of some more sordid world and fate; he seemed to embody the darkness of all her old life.

“Luncheon is served, madame, in the dining-room!” the motionless servant in black announced, with his sepulchral solemnity.

Charlotte turned back to Dorat, and answered a silent question still in his eyes.

“Afraid?” she laughed. “I’m afraid of nothing!” Then she took a deep breath and added: “Except myself!”

He turned to her impulsively, but some challenging steel-like chill in her gaze drove him back on himself. He wondered if it was the misjudgment of a spying servant that could so inflame her pride.

They went in together, silently, and the intruding note of discord hung over them all luncheon-time. It was not until they were in the music-room, and Dorat was seated at the piano, that the feeling of constraint passed away. Charlotte had asked him if all men tired of mere beauty.

“It is not beauty, when we tire of it,” he answered, with his fingers on the keys. “It is the flaw in the beauty, not the beauty itself, that cannot stand the test. For instance, take this E-flat Nocturne of Chopin. It’s a musical poem, a poem as sweet as any ever written. Yet, you see, you and I would now call it hackneyed. It has no concealments, no reticences. When art is plastic we have to have simplicity and clearness, but when it is emotional it almost seems that we must muffle and veil our meaning.”

“It is the unsaid that is the most beautiful, you mean?”

“Yes, just as the unloved is the most pathetic, and the unloved the most precious!”

“The danger always seems—in giving too much!” she answered, as she crossed the room and leaned on the piano.

He was now playing a few passages of the nocturne aimlessly, and her half-bitter tone and look were lost on him.

“Yes, Brahms’s greatness lies in the fact that in his later music he never gives you *all*. He limns and suggests, and leaves you to ruminate and think and fumble and labor over it. So the mystery of today’s reading becomes the triumph of tomorrow’s.”

For the second time that day Charlotte felt that he still stood before her, more the artist than the man. He was walled and guarded and imprisoned behind his ramparts of abstraction; it would be only in his moods of the passing moment, she felt, that he would bend to worldly things.

In the afternoon Charlotte and Dorat rode together. Her orders had been that a groom should accompany them. But no grooms were available; and after one glance at the over-corpulent figure of Peterson on horseback she laughingly ordered him back to the stables. And with Peterson’s placid descent to a second luncheon below stairs there accidentally fell away from her the last link of her day of utter freedom.

She told her companion, as the two spirited horses stepped abreast into the open road that led north past hill and wood and purple ravine, of the little Italian road-house, known as the Grapevine Inn, where they might get a cup of tea before turning homeward again.

“And kept,” she said gaily, “by none other than Antonio Boccaccio himself!”

“What a place for names, this new world of yours!” cried Dorat. “I found a Chopin in Broadway. I got my watch cleaned by a Mr. Haydn, and my laundry-woman at the hotel was Madame Schumann!”

Then they broke into a canter, and Cedarhurst soon lay behind them. Dorat, obviously, rode to cover ground, and not to strike attitudes. Charlotte wondered if this man who hated horses, and mounted them only to accomplish distance, treated other less humble things in life after the same fashion. Yet she felt, as she rode, that she was riding away from reality, that all life’s tangibilities were being left far behind her.

Sometimes when she led him through a hilly side-path that she knew, they had to stoop to escape the low branches of the trees. Sometimes they clattered down the noisy street of a little village; sometimes they found themselves in the silence of the autumnal woods.

“Rhapsodize on that for me, Master Musician!” she cried pantingly, after a hard gallop up a long wooded slope as she pointed with her stock at the wide line of hill and valley beneath them.

Dorat drew up and looked slowly about him, with his half-shut eyes.

“It would have to be called *Im Wald*,” he said, at last. “And through it all would have to run some strain of absolute serenity, some perfect stillness. Yes, it is joy, but it is not the mad joy of Spring. It is the utter peace before Death. It is the deepest and severest calm of all consummation. All that was to be has been. The oil is low in the cruse; the word has been spoken; the page has been written; the kiss has been given and taken; the Summer is over and gone! See these opaline tints, the soft green of the hills there, and the veiling mist, that hangs like memory over a lovely woman’s life. And over it all this brooding, vaulted, high American sky, as far away from us as some lost god. . . . It is love fulfilled, dying in its own arms. . . . It is satiety, completion; the song is done. . . . It is world-weariness and life grown tired of caresses. It is death and the end. It is Autumn!”

She looked at him, in silence.

“Some day I shall make a sonata of that!” he cried through his flash of enthusiasm.

There was neither shame nor reticence in his parade of emotion. He explored and defined and tabulated feeling as other men she knew would study a horse-ring or a stock-list. It frightened her a little, this unerring probing into what seemed to her the sacred timidities of feeling, this candid uncovering of mood and impression. But through it, as through a barred window, her cramped and starved soul seemed to see some far-off light and freedom.

“You are a Latin of the Latins,” she said to him. “I am an Anglo-Saxon. Have you ever thought what an ocean there is between the two races, the two temperaments!”

Dorat laughed a little.

“You are as old as Ruth, as Delilah!” his voice was rich with a sudden passionate *nuance*. “Your eyes cry out that you want companionship. If we have *camaraderie* together, you and I, there is no ocean of race, or gulf of history, or abyss of feeling, that can crowd you away from me.”

She rode on, slowly, with her eyes on the valley below them, saying as she went: “Every woman wants companionship. Every life cries for its love!”

“There are many kinds of love,” she heard him answer, as he followed her. “There is love without passion; there is love that is passion; but the only kind that lives and endures is the kind that binds in its trinity passion, sympathy and *camaraderie*.”



“And that comes dear and comes seldom.”

“Then why do you hate to speak of it, and turn away?”

“Because we are taught to be afraid to talk of love and feeling, as you French people do, on this side of the Atlantic. Or, if we’re not afraid, we’re ashamed to. It makes us uncomfortable. We would rather discuss—well, more substantial things. Aren’t you hungry?”

And off she started at her challenging gallop again, drinking in the cooling air as she went, with the wind tugging at her hair, and a reckless abandonment of joy taking possession of her at the mad heaving and rocking of her strong horse.

She drew up, laughing, as a thought came to her.

“Do you know what a woman advised me to do, when she thought I was lonely? She advised me to buy more dogs! Have you ever seen them, those pinched and disappointed women who lead dogs out on a string? Well, I have made a secret study of those women, since the efficacy of the King Charles was pointed out to me; and now I know that every woman who lavishes her affection on a poodle is invariably one of three things. She is either small-minded, or mean-spirited or broken-hearted!”

Dorat, in turn, laughed with her, though he was still a little bewildered at her sudden changes of front.

“Then who was it broke your heart?” he asked, his face a little solemn, for all the laughter about the corner of his lips.

“Thanks, for making it the best of the three!” she tried to laugh back at him. “But here I have been trying to escape to the avenues of impersonality on a poodle, and you keep dragging me back to myself.”

“But you are a woman!”

“That’s my misfortune, not my fault!”

“But women are the first and last thing men think about, want to talk about!”

“I wish,” she cried, with a little upthrust of her arms, “I wish you foreigners could observe the proprieties of impropriety!”

She felt that she could not half-say things to him, as still again she noticed his look of unhappy bewilderment. She would have to be as honest and simple and direct with him as with a child. He had always seemed unable to follow her fluttering spirit of facetiousness; it left him, she felt,

with a teasing sense of her insincerity; it was an injustice to him, she told herself, with his artist's hatred of ambiguities and indirections. Yet this ability to play over his head, as it were, had given her a false and misleading sense of security. There was still something to be wordlessly afraid of, she realized, in his primordial immediacy of assault, in his almost infantile directness of mind.

She no longer analyzed her own feelings, her own feebleness of defense, against each uncircuitous advance from him.

Her thoughts seemed to crush to pieces at the first touch of self-reproof, like a fallen cigar-ash between the fingers. Yet there were moments, she felt, when she either withheld too much or gave too much; for the uncertainty of innocence seemed benumbing her.

Yet, although love clung to her brokenly, like ink to a new pen, as she had laughingly said once, some answering simplicity in her own nature seemed to keep from her any corroding thought of error and sinfulness. She, too, she told herself, was pagan and primordial. When she was hungry she must eat; when she was lonely it was her right to love. Yet all her loves, she argued, had been probational, a sort of selfishness; a deliberate and cool-headed probing into vague and puzzling emotional probabilities. In all those girlish affections she had surrendered only the soft and youthful corners of her girlish mouth. Even Stephen Cranfill had once wrathfully declared, she remembered, that there was something cold and draining and vampirish about her, protesting that she was eating his soul out and giving him nothing in return. There had never been any ultimate and absolute surrender. That anesthesia which was supposed to accompany all great passions had never been hers. As she had once told her Aunt Agatha, she was in some ways still virginal.

She looked about her, as they rode on through russet-tinted hills all wooded with oak, with the light from the lowering sun on her face and hair. She seemed, to the man at her side, a note of restless vitality in the autumnal monotone of all the world, a something that throbbed and beat against the dead grayness of the world beyond them.

They came to a by-path, thick with fallen leaves, skirting a hill from the crest of which half-hidden windowpanes flamed back at the Western sunlight. Then the house was left behind and nothing but leaves and woods were about them again.

"Where does this lead to?" asked Dorat's voice, behind her, as she stooped to brush under an overhanging oak-bough.

“It opens into a road, further on,” she answered. “At least I *think* it opens into a road.”

Some feminine, intuitive corner of her soul seemed whispering a symbolism into the little sentence.

The path appeared to lose itself in a tangle of trees, and they both came to a full stop. A song-sparrow sang out of the stillness around them. Dorat’s horse nibbled at the wayside grass-clumps.

“I’m lost!” cried Charlotte.

Dorat dismounted, and tied his horse to a scrub-oak. Then he went to Charlotte, and held his hand out for her.

“I’m lost!” she repeated forlornly, looking with childlike eyes about the hills that hemmed them in, as she slipped her foot from the stirrup and slid to the ground.

“We both are.”

“Then we must go back,” some protesting voice within her pleaded, as the man tied her horse with the trailing bridle-rein, and stood before her in the wooded quietness that seemed as primordial as the lives it walled in from the outside world. She refused to see any deeper meaning in his words.

Yet she took his hand, and together they pushed through the underbrush, to the top of the hill. Once more there came over her the sense of something impending, for good or evil, of something emancipating and yet ominous.

“We must go back,” she said again falteringly. It was not the voice of shrinking youth that spoke; it was the voice of unabashed yet timid womanhood that knew life and the world.

He faced her suddenly, putting his hands heavily on her shoulders.

She looked bravely back into his pallid, happily unhappy face, with its humility, its riotous hunger, its sense of loneliness, its faltering weakness, as though the flame of feeling had burned away the last drop of red manhood itself. Incongruously enough, she remembered what she had written of him: “A good deal of a boy, a little bit of a baby, and a great deal of a genius!”

“I wonder,” he said quietly, with only the throaty *vibrata* of his voice to betray his inner tumult, “I wonder if this was fated?”

“What?” she demanded.

“This,” he answered. “How it is or why it is I don’t know. But something in my very soul has always cried out for you, and followed you, and been unhappy without you. It is madness, I know, but I love you! I love you!”

She struggled for a moment against something that seemed engulfing her like a rising tide. She wondered why these words could make her neither happy nor unhappy. Above all, she wondered why she should pity him, and not herself. She wondered if she was at heart the coward she felt herself to be, if it was fear that was forever to denude and delimit life for her, when all her days she had cried out for something wider and better. Then a baffling sense of loss, of resentment against him, of indeterminate betrayal at his hands, swept through her.

“You are not kind to me!” she cried, almost angrily.

She regretted the words, the moment she had spoken, stabbed by the look of pain that leaped into his face.

“Oh, weren’t we happy enough—before?” she asked, torturing her gauntlets between her nervous fingers.

“Yes, it was happiness, in a way,” he admitted. “But you know it was too much or too little. It meant that we were cheating ourselves, deceiving everything that was honest in our hearts!”

The conviction came to her, in a flash, that the man before her was as much without a moral sense as a child. It was neither audacity nor courage in him. He would not and could not look on life as she had looked on it. She wondered still again if it was cowardice that was holding her to the hard and narrow path she had followed from girlhood. She still had to cling to something, she warned herself. She was like a worshiper who still must go to the temple, although her false gods had fallen, although she knew it was mockery still to kneel at their altars. Yet, when those dim and mysterious rites had once meant so much to her, even the hollow ritual held its sway over her, in the very face of each fallen and futile god. Yes, she had been a coward from the first. She had shrunk back and subjugated her own personality for years, now; she had kept silent and endured outrages that had broken her pride. She had temporized and vacillated; and now she was paying for it.

And it was remembering these things that she burst out with a sudden defiant: “But I am happy! I have been happy!”

She almost hated him for the look of pity that crept into his eyes. But he did not draw back an inch at her little movement.

“Listen to me! I am not blind. I can see, I have seen, all along, what your life has been!”

It suddenly appalled her, to think that her posture of years had been openly comprehended. *He* understood; the whole world understood!

“Oh, Dorat!” she wailed, swept to and fro on a sudden great tide of homelessness, of friendlessness. She half raised her arms, and dropped them again. Then she looked at him with clearer and more meditative eyes. The shock that the day had brought to her seemed, of a sudden, to clarify all life.

“But can’t you see it would only be misery, for you—for me?”

Her voice trailed off into a little tremolo of wistfulness that was almost a sigh.

“I will take that misery, gladly—I will take your share and mine, if it only brings me *you!*”

“But you can’t take mine!” she mourned.

“Are you afraid of me or yourself?” he asked.

“Of myself!” she answered. “No, not of myself, but of some waiting and watching part of myself, that tells me I’ll suffer if I do wrong.”

“But it will not be wrong! It *must* not be wrong!”

“But even to speak as we do is wrong!”

“No, no; life has its right of speech. If we cannot speak we can never be free!”

“Then why not wait, and work, and some day when I may be free, perhaps, come and tell me this?”

“Because I want help,” he said humbly. “I am afraid of loneliness!”

Her arms would have gone out to him in that moment of nurturing passion, only the old engulfing flood seemed rising inch by inch about her. She seemed imprisoned behind walls that were built of dead ancestors. She was afraid of herself. She felt the tool in some hand infinitely stronger than her own will and reason. She felt weak and broken and helpless. It came to her with only a sense of languid release when she realized that Dorat had taken her hand and was holding it.

She seemed not all buoyant life and vitality now, but all fragility, all blossomy whiteness, all transient frailty—something to be watched and

cherished and guarded, Dorat felt, as that shaking hand lay in his. He looked into the drooping face, now as pale as his own.

A shiver ran through the body that had seemed so lithe and buoyant. The shadowy eyes looked up at him with some half-hopeless appeal.

“Oh, where is my strength?” she asked, as she moved to draw away from him.

“Where is your heart?” he pleaded.

“Oh, do you know what this means?” she whispered, with a little sob that was almost a moan of vague apprehension.

“If it is truth it can never mean harm!”

He drew closer to her. He could feel the warmth of her breath, the beat of the pulse through her imprisoned hand.

It maddened her to think that something was fusing and burning away her very spirit of revulsion. She wondered why she could no longer hate herself for her weakness.

Her only feeling was one of dizzy helplessness, of being torn and flung and eddied out on some grim tide that seemed bearing her beyond everything that was tangible and real in life.

“Oh, I can’t help it, I can’t help it!” she cried, through a sudden burst of tears. And some propulsion, vague, yet pitiless, some power not herself, moved her toward him, compelled her to draw his face down to hers and peer into it with wide and unhappy eyes.

At last! It had come at last, she tried to tell her bewildered heart, as she fell away from him, and mopped the hot tears from her face, and gazed at the ghost-like hills and trees about her. This thing she had mocked at had come to her at last, had come in this tangled and tearful and foreboding guise, when she was free neither to take nor to give it.

Yet the very unhappiness which would walk with her because of it, she told herself wistfully, might still purge away the accidental wickedness in it all. Even out of the ruins in which all her youth seemed to lie entombed she could build some house of final happiness. But there was much to be gone through, and much to be suffered, she felt, before the sorry scheme of things could be put right.

All this she tried to tell him, in her hesitating and broken way, as they rode home through the gathering twilight, side by side. He listened quietly,

but listened more to the tremulous softness of her voice than to the meaning of the words themselves.

Yet anything that she might wish or say, he felt, he would do. She could see, however, as they rode back into the world of actualities, that he seemed to shrink from facing the naked problem that lay before them as openly and relentlessly as she herself would face it.

Only once she came to a full stop, and for a minute or two of unbroken silence studied his uncomprehending face. Their older position, she felt, had been strangely reversed. He would have laughed the seriousness out of her grave eyes; but, apparently satisfied with her study, she drew over to him and flung out her hand with a little abandoned gesture of passion.

“Oh, why did you?” she cried inadequately, with that tragical smile which seemed so out of place on the soft and youthful contour of her face.

They swept in past the great stone gate-pillars, and up the darkening course of the driveway, to where the turrets of Cedarhurst stood cold and huge and impassive before them. To Charlotte it seemed like that dark and forbidding tower to which a certain Childe Roland once came and blew his horn.

And that, she remembered, was the end of the second day.

## V

It was Dorat and not Charlotte who most dreaded the meeting of the following morning. She was still pale with fatigue when she came down, and although there was a shadowy unhappiness about her eyes and a nervousness about her fluttering movement of the hands, a new line of firmness seemed to deepen and mature the once girlishly soft corners of her mouth.

She had wondered, it is true, if he would think her faded and wan. But it was no time for illusion, she had rigidly determined, and had added neither alleviating rose nor ribbon to her toilette.

Yet his sudden look of admiration, as he studied her face, brought a quick flush to her cheek, a flush which hung like a veil between him and her weariness. It was there at last, he felt, that final missing note which had been wanting in all her old-time abundant beauty, the conciliating sense of pathos,

the humanizing and endearing touch of tears, for which the still unsubmerged poet in him sought and demanded.

What surprised him most was the frankness and directness with which she faced the situation. He himself seemed more willing to linger and loiter back among the shadows of present uncertainties; he even confessed to her that he had as yet formulated no definite plan of action, that the knowledge of a new relationship had cut him off from everything practical, that all he still asked for was the passing day and what it brought. Yet he was ready to face any obligation, go to any end, for now he could no longer think of life without her.

There were certain phases of their relationship, he knew, which were still underground and unauthorized. But they had already been made one by love, he told her with a passionate clasp of her hand across the table; everything else was accidental and irrelevant.

But, much as it cost her, Charlotte insisted on looking things more practically and more courageously in the face. As they sat down before the blazing fire in the music-room that morning she asked that they talk the thing over together, quietly, as though it were something of the household.

She told him calmly of her unhappy life, of her long impending and too often postponed separation from her husband, of the uncertainty that until then had beset her. Now, she felt, everything had been made clear and simple to her. From that day forward, whatever Dorat and his love might grow to mean for her, she could no longer live with Stephen Cranfill. She told him, wistfully, how she regretted that the first hours of their love had been tainted with this pang of dishonesty. She had even sought out her bewildered Aunt Agatha with a vague "Oh, I need you!" until a sudden and mysterious timidity took the place of her old-time audaciousness of spirit. And she became silent again.

Dorat, himself infected with this quiet and courageous practicality in her, protested that it might be hard to remain patient, but since she asked it he would wait—wait until the end of time, and then go with her, if need be to the end of the world. They could be married, once she had secured her divorce, quietly in New York. Then they would sail for Paris. In a year or two it would be forgotten; they would be free to come and go as they liked.

"But your tour here," said Charlotte. "That must be carried through! You can't mean to cancel that?"

"Why not?" he protested. "What does all that mean to me, *now*?"



“Oh, no, no,” she pleaded. “I could never let myself come between you and your work. You might not care now; but some day you would hate me for it. That is one of the reasons I have been so open and truthful. That’s why I’ve made this talk almost a test of you—forgive me, but you know it all means so much to me! I haven’t overlooked one of the sordid and unlovely details, so that we might both learn to be brave, from the very first. Oh, Dorat, can’t you see? It’s too late for either of us to wrap ourselves in rose-leaves and forget everything. We are no longer boy and girl; we are man and woman, and we want happiness, and life, and all that life can give us. But there are certain things we *must not* pay out for it.”

“But what is work—beside *you*! All this music—it is only a sighing after something. You, *you* are the end of it, the soul of it. With you I want nothing—the last bar to happiness has been beaten down!”

She looked at him with wide and studious eyes.

“Oh, I know,” she cried, with her habitual little hand-sweep of protest. “I know what it will mean. It’s like what you told me about Mendelssohn, who never had adversity enough, who never suffered enough, and so never became one of the greatest. A happy people has no history; and a happy heart has no history. Oh, I know; it will be only one of two things! Either all that is best in you, all that I most love in you, will wither and die away, either you will be satisfied with today and the world, or you will find out that I have come between you and your work, and you will hate me for it. Then, because of it, you will some day let me pass out of your life.”

The solemnity of this new note in her puzzled him.

“No, no, no!” he cried back. “It’s only the man who can love greatly can work greatly. Why, the season of love is always the season of war—or work!” he added impetuously.

“Yes, but his work will always be the rainbow after his tempest of passing love, with the artist. He will let it go; he will even look for it and wait for it, and console himself, for all his pain and loneliness, if he has any, by saying that it’s suffering that really makes him what he is. You are all artists first—and who can blame you for it?—and men only in your intermissions. That’s why you have all made women suffer so much!”

“It is you, and the women who say these things with you, who make us suffer. There is Chopin; his life was in his music. But when George Sand killed that life she killed his music!”

“Ah, yes, and there is Tchaikovsky and Antonia Milkuyova, on the other hand, and all the misunderstanding and misery and wretchedness. Do you remember the other woman, the other woman who was as much to him as even Frau Wesendonk was to Richard Wagner? He had never even seen this other woman, this Madame Von Meek, who loved him through his music, and not through his poor, wayward, irresponsible body. Do you remember how nobly this woman helped him, and encouraged him, how she saved him from himself and from the world? Why can’t I be that woman to you, and not the other? It isn’t too late yet.”

“It *is* too late,” he broke in passionately.

“Yes, it might hurt, at first, but wouldn’t it be the best and the bravest thing to do?”

She turned to him, unhappily, still determinedly, pleading that he withhold that something for which her whole heart cried out. It was already too late to draw back to the old impersonal relation. Yet even as she stood enchained at the gates of love, entranced by the vistas of some wider garden, she found herself pleading with him to bar her out.

“Oh, Jean, can’t you see?” she cried helplessly, unable to put into words the feeling that oppressed her.

“No, I can see nothing—nothing but you!” was his answer, as he rose and paced the wide room.

“If I had only met you two years ago!” he cried passionately. “If only that afternoon in the atelier of Carolus Duran, where I first saw and watched you, and you never knew it—if only I had taken fate in my hand, and pushed through and met you! I lost you then, through hesitation, through star-gazing! But this time I cannot and must not lose you, for all these vague fears and scruples of yours. It’s too late to hesitate and question now; we are in the sweep of the current. Our fate lies on the knees of the gods. What seems to disquiet you is the thought that I’m not an idler in life, like—like—other men you know. I have my tasks to do; that’s true! I have my life to work out, and I must confess that with music it is work, work, incessant work. But in all this you can be my help, my very soul of inspiration!”

“It isn’t the work,” she tried to explain to him; “it’s the temperament. I know life isn’t all love; work counts just as much in it. But if you sacrificed your work *for* love, for me, that would mean misery. So if you sacrificed me for work, that, too, would be misery!”

She came over to him, with a self-deprecating outthrust of the arms, and caught his hand in hers, as he stood gazing at a water-color she had made during her student days in Paris. It was a little airy glimpse of a Normandy landscape, and once she had been proud of it. As her eyes followed his, and she gazed at the picture, it brought a little rush of cooling memories to her distraught mind, like a breath of fresh air to a feverish face.

“Who painted that?” he asked suddenly, as he tried to decipher the blurred initials in the corner of the picture. “Isn’t it the hillside above Dives?”

“Yes,” she admitted. “But don’t look at it too closely. It’s my own work. This large canvas is the one I’m least ashamed of. I call it ‘The Woodgatherers.’ Could you imagine what I tried to do there? I thought I could paint wet sunlight, woody sunshine after rain, and there it is, you see, looking as though it had been whitewashed with skimmed milk!”

“When did you do this?” There was an unlooked-for note of excitement in Dorat’s voice and gesture.

“One Summer at Melun—one Summer when I had three happy weeks in Barbizon. There was a time, you know, when I used to think I could paint things!”

“It is fine! It is splendid! And it is yours!” He turned and caught her hands in both of his. “*Here* is the answer to all your talk. There, in that little frame, lies the end of all your fears. I felt it; I knew it from the first! You are *one* of us. You are an artist yourself. You are one of the guild; and you have nothing to fear from your own!”

She understood it only vaguely, but it filled her with a new hope and happiness. It was the beating down of the last bar of caste and prejudice. Thereafter he was to treat her as an equal and a comrade; they were of one and the same order.

Accidental as it all was, she felt that there was something momentous in the episode. She wrung from it the last drop of timely consolation; and with that opportune balm came the end of all opposition.

The completeness of her mental surrender bewildered even herself. After all, she told herself, her soul was not a Sahara of selfishness; she was not an utter desert of apathy; it was, rather, that life had lain like a karoo, wanting only some belated rain to make it burst into bloom.

“You have tamed and broken me,” she said humbly.

He led her to the open piano, and with one elbow on the polished surface of the mahogany she leaned over and watched him as he sat there at the keyboard, preluding happily. She watched the dash and flutter of the flexible, resilient, well-trained fingers with a new interest and wonder; they were the ten-throated voice through which he was revealing himself to her, and to her alone. Through them he could speak even more adroitly than with the tongue itself. Through them his soul could flower into an utterance too fine and quick for words and speech. And as she watched the magician-like hands, the sense of duality that had teased her, the feeling that the man and the artist were two distinct and opposing entities in him disappeared for all time.

“Listen; this is *you*! This is what your face says to my soul. This is what I feel when I see that wonder in your eyes!”

She listened, with her head supported on her upraised arms. He was playing Chopin now, the soft movement from the concerto where the dead master’s love for his fugitive ideal, his faithless Constantia, was mirrored. Then he rambled on, and played for her, one by one, the Preludes, until the waves of music seemed to beat down the world about her and leave him and her enisled there alone in the core of all created things. New and delicious thoughts seemed to draw a sacred veil about them. Only once, through the exquisite poetry he was pouring into her ears, did any incongruous thought creep. It was the flash, across some deep cell of memory, of a fur-coated figure in a motor-car. The mouth was coarse and grim, and the familiar red face was drunk with speed-drunkenness, as the whirring engine and its figure seemed to melt again into nothingness.

Then she was in the warm room again, alone with the man she loved, listening to the melting bars of the music he was flinging about her. She felt that she was understanding Chopin in a new light. A wordless loneliness seemed to enmuffle her, a passion for bodily companionship. Some word or chord just beyond his reach she felt would undo her utterly, would bring her weeping and shuddering at his feet.

“This,” he said quietly, “is the Nocturne in G-major. Listen!”

She listened, with quickened breathing and throbbing pulses, while the double notes and the passionate middle movement with all its wonderful melody melted about her. He was torturing her, she felt; he was almost stifling her, killing her with love.

The music stopped.

“I love you!” she sobbed, groping toward him blindly.

A moment later they were in each other’s arms, and as she felt his kiss on her mouth she believed that from that moment forward nothing could make her question or hesitate. It was love with her, for the first time, that forgot and that exacted nothing. She no longer looked to herself and her own happiness; it was a passion to nurture, to lavish and give and make happy that possessed her.

“Don’t move!” said Dorat suddenly, as he held her. She heard his sharply indrawn breath, and wondered vaguely the meaning of it. The feeling that she had passed through the scene once before flashed through her mind. Then the sound of another voice broke in on her drowsy ears.

“Madam, for God’s sake——”

Dorat held her close.

“Madam, he is here—he has seen you!”

It was Wilson, her servant, speaking to her, from the doorway.

“I must tell you, madam,” he called to her, in alarm, from where he stood, “*he’s* come!”

“Don’t move!” commanded Dorat again, sternly, with his arm still about her drooping figure.

She struggled to free herself, in sudden terror, but he held her firmly. A quick step smote the marble floor of the hall.

“So you’re in it, too, are you? Get out of my way, you fool, or I’ll knock you down!”

“One moment, sir! Just one moment, if you please, sir!”

“Stand aside, or I’ll break your head!”

Wilson, in the doorway, had tried to block his master’s entrance. There was the noise of a short scuffle and the fall of an overturned chair.

“You hound! You cur! You *damned* hound!” rang through the room, as the husband confronted the man who had robbed him of even his empty husks of happiness.

Stephen Cranfill still wore his wet and mud-stained automobile coat of brown bearskin, his peaked motor-cap was still on his head, and the

reddened face, now almost claret-color with passion, was splashed here and there with road mud. There was something Titan-like and aboriginal in his great, shaggy, towering figure. For a moment Charlotte shrank back under the shoulder of Dorat, who still stood over her, shaking a little, deathly white about the face, but clear of eye and firm of mouth.

The great, mud-stained figure in the bearskin coat advanced on the two terribly, quivering with his mounting wrath.

“You miserable, slinking street fiddler!” he cried. “You puny French cur, slinking about my house with your underhand intrigues! You——”

“Stop!” commanded the other man.

“Stop? Who’ll make me stop? D’you think you’ll come into *my* house and make love to *my* wife, and then have me stop, you simpering play-actor! D’you think I’ll have you stand there and maul her this way, to my face! I’m going to kill you, you damned hound!”

He was tearing off his great sodden overcoat with shaking hands. Wilson, flinging down his silver crumb-knife and tray, tried to drag his master away. One bear-like blow sent the old servant sprawling on the polished floor.

The quivering woman closed her eyes and waited, she scarcely knew for what, yet she felt that now all she could do was wait.

“You’re the fool!” she heard Dorat cry. “You’re the fool, to think you can fight like a street loafer, for this!”

“Yes, I’ll fight like a street loafer, or like a street cat, for this, you sneak! You’ll get no mincing duels from me, you frog-eater!”

Charlotte saw him catch up the heavy silver crumb-knife. She saw it flash up over their heads, and heard the little cry of alarm from Wilson.

Dorat flung up his left arm, to ward the blow from his head, for his right arm was still about the woman. He caught the descending blow on the upturned forearm, just above the wrist joint, and a little gasp of pain broke from his throat. He looked at it once, vacuously, where a red stain was already spreading over the white cuff, and then he flung the woman aside and leaped at the other man, with a throaty little inarticulate cry of fury.

They swayed and struggled and panted together, until the cowering woman, who had covered her face with her hands, groped back until she leaned flat against the wall, where she stood, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, watching, stricken into a paralysis of helplessness.

It flashed across her consciousness, ludicrously, that she was a cave woman, a creature of the flint and arrow age, and that she was being fought for, on a skin-strewn cave floor, by two disheveled and shaggy males. They were there before her, snarling and battling for her body like two animals; and the sudden thought of the bestial and pagan coarseness of it all stung her into a panting and sickening disgust.

Her next feeling was one of pity, for her husband now held the slighter man pinned down between his knees, against the piano chair, with his huge hand on Dorat's throat, throttling him, holding his head down on the very keyboard from which the wavering nuances of Chopin had been sounded.

A sudden fury at the unfairness of it seized her, and she flung herself on the throttler with all the strength of her well-muscled young body.

"You coward!" she cried, and again the ludicrous thought of the cave woman flashed through her, as she tore at his hair and face and forced the shaggy head back on the huge shoulders till a volley of oaths burst from his lips. But still she tugged and twisted and struggled desperately, until he was compelled to relax his hold. Then Dorat, finding himself free, fell to the floor, and painfully and slowly gathered himself up. His face was bloodless, the dull gray of wood ashes. It was only his eyes that showed any life; they were distended and luminous, glowing now with a dull and lupine sort of hate.

"Oh, you fool!" he said, as he bound his still bleeding wrist with his handkerchief, while Charlotte and the footman still clung to his writhing enemy. "You fool, to think you can fight for a woman like a butcher. You have the mind of a butcher, and the soul of a butcher, or you would never have lost her, and would never have needed to fight for her!"

"Lost her? By God, man, do you mean to stand there and taunt me about that!"

He flung his captor off and made a lunge at his opponent; but for some occult reason the clenched fist which he raised refrained from striking.

"Yes, I mean to taunt you," flamed back Dorat, out of his white and inwardly consuming fury. "*I love your wife!* Do you hear me say it?—I love your wife! And if you have a soul above that of a drunken butcher, my brave strangler of men and women, you will know what to do, and you will do it. It's what a gentleman does in such cases. You have pistols in the house, you have also——"

"Yes, by God, I have pistols in the house!"

“Then, monsieur, why delay?” demanded Dorat, with his white-lipped and half-mocking smile of fury. “It is, I believe, the only thing for the occasion. As you see, there is one too many of us. It is a matter that is easily settled.” He turned to the quaking servant, who had broken down at the wild scene and was weeping audibly.

“Will you kindly fetch us monsieur’s pistols, at once?”

“Wilson, get my pistols from the smoking-room mantel!” cried Stephen Cranfill, with an impatient oath of finality.

The two men stood facing each other, and the watching woman could see the animal-like hate that flashed from one face to the other. And still again the impression flashed over her that she was a cave woman, in the early childhood of the world, a she-creature of an uncouth and primordial age, and that two males of her tribe were engaged in deadly combat for possession of her. The loathsomeness, the atavistic brutishness of it, sickened and startled her.

“Wilson, you will do nothing of the kind,” she called out sharply. She stood between the two combatants now, clear-eyed, with her head thrown resolutely back, quivering in her black rage.

“There will be no fighting here, sirs! There will be no fighting and killing for my love! Do you imagine I will stand and watch you battle and bellow for me like two stags? Do you imagine that I will endure this sort of mock-heroics?”

She was quivering and shaking, but she flashed a look of infinite scorn from the one to the other as she tried to school herself to be calm.

“I’m going to kill that man, or he kills me!” cried the livid husband, making a move as though to sweep her aside.

“If you kill that man, Stephen Cranfill,” and she spoke now with the utmost deliberation and slowness, “if you kill that man, as surely as I breathe and stand here I shall kill you! It is too late, I tell you, for that sort of thing. Pistols and braggart words can’t shoot these things out of life. You had a fair field; you were treated honestly; you were given your chance. *And you lost it!*”

“Lost it?” he echoed.

“Yes, lost it. From this day *I* have something to say about my life, and where and how I shall lead it!”

“You mean that *you* and this slinking street fiddler——”



“Yes,” said the woman, “that is what I mean!”

He looked at her for one blind and bewildered moment. A foul name escaped from his now pallid lips. Then, without sign or warning, he struck her full on the face with his fist.

Dorat caught her as she fell back, and as the weight of her body came against him she locked her arms madly about him and clung to him, clung to him desperately and stubbornly, till he ceased trying to free himself.

The man who had struck the blow looked at them drunkenly, then he turned away and reeled out of the room, crying insanely as he went: “Oh, I’m sick—my God, *I’m sick!*”

They heard his steps cross the hall; they heard the outside door close behind him; a minute later they heard his voice and then the puff and whirr of his motor-car as it dashed and slewed down the winding gravel driveway.

Dorat tried to force back the arms that clung to him so passionately. A little half-articulate cry burst from his lips as he did so. For the first time the pain of his wounded wrist pierced through him.

He peered down at it, studying with terrified eyes the blood-stained handkerchief and the discolored and swollen flesh.

“What is it?” she gasped, for she saw the wordless horror that had mounted into his face.

He tore himself away, with a cry of anguish, and flung himself into the chair before the keyboard. She knew it was the opening chords of the Nocturne in G-major that he struck, but through it all she heard only his repeated little cry of anguish.

“It is the end—the end of everything!” he gasped.

She looked down vacantly, and at first did not quite understand. Then the marred and missing notes took on a meaning to her as she looked. She saw the broken and trailing left hand, and she understood.

Two of the fingers dragged lax and dead and motionless along the keys. The superficial flexors along the wrist-bone had been severed. For all time the third and fourth fingers were to be muted, lifeless, voiceless.

“It is the end—of everything,” he repeated childishly, looking up at her, but not seeming to see her. Then he fell forward along the keyboard with a sullen, cacophonous crash of sound.

“Oh, my own, my beloved own!” she cried passionately, as she flung herself on him and clung to him, and bent over him, as though to shield him from some impending fate too dark for him to bear alone.

## VI

Charlotte, as she tossed to and fro on her white bed that night, lived over her day of horrors, hour by hour and moment by moment. Sometimes, half drowsing, she would utter a little cry and moan aloud. Toward morning she fell into a fitful sleep of sheer exhaustion. When she awoke, stifling and trembling from a dream that she was being harried and chased naked through city streets alive with malignant and merciless human faces, the sun was already high in the sky.

She lay there on her pillow, grateful for the wholesome light, for the sheltering, homely realities that enmuffled her and gave tangibility to her quietening thoughts. She felt sore and bruised in body and sore and bruised in mind and heart. She struggled, wearily, to straighten things out, to excuse conditions, and to anticipate the future.

But she stood at a crossroad that bewildered her with its ever ramifying possibilities. All her older theories and tendencies of life seemed to have been uprooted; in one day her very identity seemed to have withered and died. Thoughts that seemed unworthy of her womanhood came and went through her bewildered mind. Yet she was made for loyalty, she felt; the sense of duplicity had always exacted rapacious suffering from her. She could not lend herself easily to deceit and wrongdoing.

In that, she felt, lay the bitterest sting of all. She had already asked so much of this love—this love which had now come to her ragged and torn and begrimed with its tainting earthliness. She had dreamed that it could rhapsodize away its own incompetencies. She writhed in mute but bitter protest against the blind fate that seemed to have cheated her at every turn, that had crushed her so capriciously, so undeservedly, and yet so hopelessly.

Yet love was something, she consoled herself, however enthorned the rose might come to her hand. She had always dreaded isolation. She could not altogether forsake her passionate quest of life's joyousness. Whatever befell, she would love Dorat to the last—together they would travel down the lonely watershed of life. Even to remember that he was under the same roof with her brought with it an alleviating sense of companionship, an impatient longing to see him and hear him speak. She could now only fling

herself on the tides of passion, and let them carry her wherever they would. The die had been cast; the frontier had been crossed. It was now neck or nothing with them both.

She wondered, with a sudden little twinge of terror, if Dorat himself might not in time prove unstable. She remembered how he had spoken of Pierre Loti and the forsaken Rarahu, how quietly he had explained the poor little *musma* forsaken in her Japanese garden as the fated victim of an ill-fated love; like Juliet, she had been “star-crossed” from the first. Then, when might not one of those fragile and exquisite Parisian women of his old world claim him, and carry him away from her, even as she had been carried away from Stephen?

It would kill her, she told herself; living, from the moment she lost him, would be intolerable. She even felt that she could welcome the loneliness of their impending life, of social ostracism with him, if only it was to assure her of his loyalty for the future. If they should lose their good name together, and be openly barred from the world that had known and nurtured them, she could not altogether complain. The very isolation of his future days, she felt, would leave him with only her to lean upon. Yet she knew that in the life of the artist, for reasons she could not fathom, women had always played momentous parts, either for good or for bad.

Then she remembered, with a start of mingled horror and pity, that Dorat was no longer an artist. From that day forward he could be only the dreamer with the stricken hand. His career was closed. She wondered, with a great surge of sympathy, if love could make amends for the loss; if love such as he had never known nor dreamed of could round out and complete the broken arc.

It was she who had been the cause of it all. Nothing, she told herself passionately, could now turn her from her course of self-immolation. Everything should be sacrificed in that lifelong appeasement. She was no longer afraid of life and of herself.

Her train of thought was suddenly disrupted by a tap on her bedroom door. It was Marcelle, her maid, red-eyed and white-faced.

Even the servants, Charlotte remembered, must already know everything. And it astonished her that no sense of self-shame came with the thought.

“It is your aunt, madam,” explained the tearful maid. “She is waiting to see you!”

“Then bring my dressing-gown,” said Charlotte, with widening eyes, as she saw the girl break into a torrent of tears.

“It is important, madam; you must not wait!” answered the maid, and still again the sense of something ominous crept into Charlotte’s benumbed mind.

Even as she looked and wondered a second hurried tap sounded on the half-open door, and a moment later Charlotte saw her Aunt Agatha, all in black, slip into the room. She closed the door carefully behind her, and motioned Marcelle out of the room. Then she came over to the wide white bed, with its great luxurious bank of pillows.

“My darling child!” she said, with a low and quavering voice. Then she hesitated, but the mere sound of her voice had brought a gush of hot tears to the younger woman’s eyes.

“Oh, Aunt Agatha, Aunt Agatha!” cried Charlotte, feeling cold and hard and alienated, for the first time, in that benignant spirit’s presence.

Yet a moment later the two women were in each other’s arms, and the last paling of restraint had been broken down.

“My dear, you must be brave, very brave.”

“Yes, yes; I know I must.”

“*Then they have told you?*”

“Told me? Told me what?” asked the woman on the bed, for the first time making full note of the white and weary face, and the hands that trembled a little, and the shadow of something premonitory about the kindly old eyes.

“Something has happened?” cried the girl shrilly.

“Yes, dear, something has happened! But you must be brave and strong and quiet! Will you promise me?”

“What is it this time? Oh, what is it?”

“There has been an accident, dear; a terrible accident. But is this what you call being brave?”

“Oh, I can stand it, Aunt Agatha—only tell me *what* it is. It’s the suspense, the uncertainty!”

“It was Stephen, dear.”

“Stephen?” she echoed.

“It happened in some way with the automobile. They found him this morning, at the foot of the Highburn Embankment. He was pinned under the machine.”

“Dead?” gasped the woman, sitting up in the wide white bed.

“Yes, dear, he was dead. He had been dead from the first!”

“How did it happen?” she moaned out.

“It will never be known, dear, just how it happened, for he was alone. Whether it was the darkness, or whether it was some fault with the steering gear, or whether it was something else, something I haven’t the heart to speak to you of, no one knows.”

Charlotte had covered her face with her hands, bent forward until her bowed head lay between her up-drawn knees. She did not cry out at first, and no tears came to her throbbing eyes. There was little response from the tired mind and body; the overwrought nerves refused to answer to this ultimate lash of fate.

“Oh, Aunt Agatha, you don’t blame me?” she whispered.

“No, not you, my child—no, no; I only pity you.”

“It was that something else!” moaned the woman on the bed quietly, through her effacing fingers. “It was that *something else!*”

“I understand,” said the older woman, out of the silence that followed.

“And you hate and despise me?” still moaned the younger woman, out of the very ashes of her ancient fires of pride.

“No, my darling girl; I only pity you!”

## VII

During the first gray days that followed the death of her husband Charlotte Cranfill lived and moved as in a dream. Every sense and nerve seemed deadened; she appeared to face the black actualities of the tragedy with the mild abstraction of a sleep-walker. In Mrs. Shotwell, fortunately, she found a judicious and most thoughtful emissary between the world of exigent realities and the world of shadows and silence into which her mind seemed to wander.

She felt her spirit tortured with a vague yet persistent self-reproof at the thought that she had stood so unprepared for calamity, that life had always been so softly shrouded and upholstered and draped for her, leaving her thus broken and unnerved under the chance stroke of destiny. It recalled to her one memorable day in her early childhood, when her nurse had taken her walking along the winding asphalt paths of Riverside Park. A shunting freight train had come to a stop between the parapet where she stood and the Hudson. From the slatted door of a cattle car she had suddenly caught sight of a lamb's head, and heard its little dolorous bleat. She demanded to know where captive lambs came from and where they were going. "To the butcher's, dearie, of course!" answered the unperturbed nurse. She looked at them again, sick and faint, stabbed at the thought of their doom—inexorable, predestined, irrevocable, however they swarmed or crowded or cried. They could not get away—they were going to be held and penned and killed!

She had descended in a rage, the rage of an arbitrary child, demanding their release. She had stormed and stamped and wept, begging for their innocent lives. The train had crept on. Her heart had blackened and rebelled against all life, against God Himself. For a year, indeed, she had eaten no meat. But she had never quite forgotten that lamb-bleat from the crowded car. It was her initiation into the tragedy of existence, into the underlying brutalities of life which no appeasing emotionalism could refine away, which no barriers of studied luxury could shut out from her.

And for the second time this feeling had taken possession of her. The newspaper announcements of the motor accident had been sensational, and to the different phases of the story, as far as it could be learned, much space was given. Mrs. Shotwell had even decided that Charlotte should see none of these reports.

In this effort, however, she was defeated by Charlotte herself. That self-torturing spirit, slipping down in the early gray of the morning to the servants' quarters, had secured copies of the city papers, and once back in her own room had determinedly if shrinkingly read each line, each detail, each perversion and exaggeration of truth. She seemed to bare for and welcome each blow, with the calm ecstasy of a flagellant.

One strange assumption, and one which Mrs. Shotwell had allowed to go publicly uncontradicted, was that Dorat had been in the motor-car with Stephen Cranfill and had been found wandering about in a dazed condition by Andrew Wilson, one of the servants at Cedarhurst. The first report showed him as suffering only from bruises and a shaking-up; but on the second morning large headlines recounted how Jean Dorat, the French

pianist, the greatest of the performers of the younger school, the only man who had promised to stand beside Paderewski and Bauer and Hoffmann, would never play in public again. It had been found that two of the tendons in his wrist had been broken in the accident. Although the best medical and surgical skill was being promptly employed on the case, two of the young pianist's fingers would remain practically useless. One of the papers even gave interviews with two eminent surgeons on the case, and accompanied its reports with diagrams of the injured wrist and photographs of the wrecked machine.

Dorat's old-time Paris friend, Adolphe Meran, the artist, came the day after the funeral and took his weak and shattered comrade back to the city with him. Although Dorat had asked for a word or two with Charlotte before going, Mrs. Shotwell had intervened. It was as well, Charlotte forlornly decided, though a cold fog of emptiness, of desolation, settled down on her world at the thought of his departure.

From the shadowy quietness of her room she heard the sharp, decisive, trap-like slam of his carriage door and the dying rattle of the wheels down the winding driveway. She was being punished as she had deserved. It seemed to her that with the passing of those carriage wheels the last remnant of something vital and warm was fading out of her life. All existence seemed to her a smooth incline of polished and treacherous ice that sloped and fell away into glacial depths. There could be neither stay nor support for her now, she felt, on that terrible slope; all she could do was to close her eyes and shut out the bottomless abysses that confronted her.

This persistent and almost unendurable sense of loneliness kept possession of her heart, notwithstanding all the intimacies and sympathies which surrounded her. Through the household of rustling relatives in black, and solemn-faced servants, and the subdued and somber half-lights of all the carefully shaded rooms, she moved like a listless ghost sighing for some upper air of memory. She was always a lover of warmth and color and movement. She was, normally, a woman of abundant vitality, and under all the ashen exterior, day by day, as her bodily strength came back to her, the smothered coals of feeling warmed and glowed with some promise of their old-time intensity.

This gave a new turn to her sense of loneliness. She longed to see Dorat; she felt the necessity for his companionship. She tried to solace herself with memories. She retraced the paths where they had once walked. She remembered the very cushion against which the russet head had once rested and the chairs he had sat in. One dark afternoon of wind and driving rain she

had even flung herself with a little passionate cry on the keyboard of the piano where his soul had cried out to hers; through the hot tears she found herself gazing down on the insensate ivory keys.

When Dorat wrote to her an impetuous and forlorn note of misery, protesting that he needed her and could not live without her, she cast discretion to the winds and returned to the city. There she drove straight to Meran's studio apartment in Washington Square, only to find that both Dorat and his friend were out. There was a consultation that afternoon, the servant told her; three well-known surgeons were to examine Monsieur Dorat's injured hand, and perhaps they were to operate on it.

As her brougham turned out from the curb a hansom drove up. In it, against the shadow of the green trimming cloth of the cab hood, she could see the white and unhappy face of Dorat. A throb of pain, as tangible as a bullet shot, flashed through her breast. He seemed to her, as he sat there, so engulfed in some terrible isolation of soul, so hopeless in his misery of body and sickness of heart, that a little half-smothered, mother-like cry of pity broke from Charlotte's lips. He seemed only the crushed shell of a man; the very flame of life seemed to have died out of him. He was defeated and broken and hopeless. Now, of all times, he needed all the warmth that love could fling about him, all the care and appeasing tenderness that friendship could bring to him. She watched him dismount and pay the driver, and then saw him turn and pace the round of the autumnal square as though it was madness itself he was walking out of his blood. She circled after him, at a funereal pace, all the while oppressed by the feeling that she was fulfilling the last rite to the ashes of something she had loved.

And she did love him, she felt. She loved him with a wildness of heart that seemed as old as the world, that seemed timeless and boundless. It made her think that a million women had lived and died so that from hand to hand this heightening torch of love might finally be passed down to her. It had begun with the first animal-cry of some lonely she-thing for its primitive mate; it was old and irresistible and unreasoning. For good or for bad, for sorrow or for happiness, she must bow to it. All along that lonely furrow, turned up, as it were, by the plowshare of her unhappiness, she seemed to see signs and tokens of earlier comrade ghosts; an arrowhead here, a shred of pottery there, a pitiful copper bead or two somewhere else. She was not the master of her own destiny; some power above and beyond her had made her the toy of its implacably wayward caprices.

This was the feeling that ran swiftly and turgidly through her, and she followed the pacing form with her eyes, and knew from the restless, nervous



stride of the thin figure that he was walking out the bitterness of some inward battle and defeat. Her first impulse was to step out of her carriage and join him. On second thought, she ordered her coachman to overtake Dorat and draw up at the curb before him.

This he did, though Dorat himself looked twice at the flutter of the black-gloved hand before he realized just who it was.

She swung wide the brougham door for him, and he stepped inside.

“Thank God, it’s you!” he said, as he took her hand.

“I had to come,” she answered simply.

Then, instinctively, she glanced down at the maimed hand. He followed her eyes, and turned away with a sudden little jerk of passion, gazing out of the misty carriage window at the waning afternoon.

“Is there no hope?” she asked, as bravely as she could.

“Not a shred,” he answered, without looking at her.

She covered the ineloquent fingers with her own shielding hand, uttering a little half-cry of compassion as she did so. And she, in her foolishness, had once dreamed that she might make him strong through his loneliness! She had preached to him the sermon that nothing could succeed like failure. She had vainly believed that the adversity and isolation of some almost perverse passion would leave him only his work—and her. Even in the earliest days she had once said to him: “Somebody’s got to break your heart, my fine young man, before you’ll ever be a true master!” She remembered his look as he answered, with his half-angry and his half-pleading brow: “Madam, I know it! The splints we bind the broken heart up with—we call it Music!”

“Oh, no; I don’t mean altogether that,” she had argued. “I give you credit for your twenty years of technique, but with all that, until you’ve suffered, you are only a voice, with nothing much to sing about!”

And there had been everything but anger in his eyes as he answered: “Then it will be only you, madam, who will make a true master of me!”

This, she told herself, was the mocking way in which fate had answered her prayer. Her reward had been ironic in its amplitude; she was like that Roman girl of whom she had once read, the gate-keeper’s daughter who betrayed her city, and for it was left bleeding and buried under the weight of the very jewels she had exacted from the invading barbarians.

“Oh, Dorat,” she cried, as he explained to her the disheartening decision of the surgeons, “need it seem so hopeless? After all, you are still the artist you always were. You still have your dreams, your aspirations. If one avenue of escape has been closed, can’t you still find another? I mean, can’t you find other tools, some other medium of expression?”

“No, there’s nothing left! They said the fingers would be always stiff—see, they have only the strength of a baby’s! If it had been the right hand, there would be the violin left me, for I could still have bowed with what remained of this half-dead thing. But even then, there would be years of work!”

He drew from his pocket, with a grim smile, the poster which was to be used for his tour, the lithographed head, and the great block-type beneath it.

“Isn’t it fine and handsome?” he mocked, holding it up before him. “A flake of the storm that never came! A leaf of the Spring that never arrived!”

Then he told her how he had crept into the Pachmann recital a few days before, how he had waited and listened and watched, and how he had fled from the hall in terror, feeling that he was going mad.

Although she felt the inadequacy of all argument, her mind still groped about for some alleviating outlook.

“But,” she pleaded, and her voice, if not her words, carried a sudden balm to his despairing soul, “aren’t all artists really one brotherhood? If it’s *in* you, this thing we call art, won’t it still struggle to find some new way of escape? Don’t you remember what you said about your *Im Wald* sonata? Why can’t you give your time to things like that?”

“To that?”

“Yes, to actual creation, to composition?”

Milton when he was blind, Beethoven when he was deaf, both of these men achieved their supremest triumphs. Then why, she continued in her determined bravery, could not he turn to these higher things?

“But they were masters! They were Titans!”

“Which you, in the end, can make yourself!”

“But I have to live. It means years and years of waiting!”

“What of that?”

“I am penniless, even now!” he answered.

“I have millions!” she answered very simply.

“My God, my God!” he cried, “your money—it’s not money I want! It’s you!”

“That you always had!” she answered, equally as simply. “It is that which is costing us both so much. It’s for what that has already exacted that I feel I can never quite repay you.”

“Stop!” he commanded. He turned away. Being a man, he was ashamed of his tears.

She put an arm on his shoulder, and as he felt the shielding weight of it he turned slowly and looked at her face.

He continued to look into her face, perplexed and unhappy, yet with the familiar old touch of reckless passion in his gaze. This was the woman, he remembered, who had come, golden and misty, between him and his great end; this was the face which had drifted in between him and his work. He had felt that no release could come to him until he had lived out his love for her, until he had met and conquered her, as he had met and conquered the more tangible obstacles of his earlier life. She, with her dangerously alluring loveliness, he had felt, was like a fair and milky country which the army of his ambition must devastate as it marched on. He had been impelled to pursue her with a fury that would exhaust both his own passion and her own possibilities. In the strait and rigorous path which he had chosen to follow it was demanded by the economy of existence that no soft side-issues should distract him from his end. He must march long, and he must march light.

Now, as he felt the bewildering warmth of her body so close to his own, and drank in her beauty, touched through tears into a subtler power, he knew how he had erred, from the first. He remembered, incongruously enough, what Meran had once said to him: “Whoever has a woman twisted round his finger, my son, has a woman twisted round his neck!” It was not to exhaust and devastate and forsake that this strangely new and more benignant passion called for; it was to bind and appease and possess. To hold her by combat would mean to hold her only through unrest and weariness and struggle, with all their enslaving obligations. Through the milder dominion only could he now find freedom. It was veritably by tying her on his back, firmly and forever, that his hands at least might be free. Yet, at any hazard and at any sacrifice, he felt, he must now fling himself upon the surface of this vast new current, denuding or releasing as it should prove to be.

He caught the little black-gloved hand in his own, and her wondering eyes looked up at him half-timidly. He was no longer Parisian; his foreign atmosphere seemed to have crept away from him. He was one of her own continent, of her own kind.

“Oh, Charlotte!” he said, and his throat choked up like a boy’s.

“Dear and dearest!” she murmured softly, and he could see the quick heaving of her breast.

Then, with a cry that might have been either anguish or joy, she had hidden her face in the hollow of his shoulder, and they were locked in each other’s arms.

Outside the fragile barrier of the two misty brougham windows lights and carriages, men and women, houses and streets, flowed by them on either hand. Yet they saw and knew nothing of this world so close about them: they were alone in time and space.

It was all so incongruously and so virginally new to her, this compulsion of final love, that she could scarcely question or deny its claim. It enwrapped and bewildered her. It was only in the dim backgrounds of consciousness that any thought of her love’s untimeliness, that any mockery of the hour and the circumstance, remained. She felt, with a sudden pang of half-guilty self-reproof, that until that hour she herself had been the wooer and he the wooed. She wondered if they were only the muffled deceptions of sex, those rosy reticences and advances of her timorous heart; she tried to tell herself that they were not the petty dishonesties of self-seeking, but the bending to some higher and blinder honesty beyond her woman’s comprehension.

“Oh, Dorat, I love you!” she cried, beyond all reserve and reluctance now.

But even then her moment of abandonment was not all abandonment. Even while she floated freest in that new emotional element which had engulfed her she felt most keenly the tenuous yet imprisoning nets of tradition. She wondered if it were not the voice of her New England ancestry calling to her out of the past—out of the dead past that was never really dead. She wondered why the abundant life of today, the leaping and vivid dreams of tomorrow, should always be burdened and saddened with the ghost of some unforgotten yesterday.

“I know I am going to suffer for all this,” she mourned, “but *I can’t help it!*”

“But what have you done?” demanded the uncomprehending man at her side.

“It’s not what I’ve done—it’s what I may do—it’s what I *am!*” she went on in a hopeless effort to make him understand. “But I can’t help it—I’ve got to live my life. I’ve got to, whatever it costs. When the time comes I’ll take my punishment, and grin and bear it!”

And still he could not understand the cause of her unhappiness.

“Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?” she murmured out of her newer depths of helplessness, as she remembered the untimeliness of it all, the mockery of the cards as they fell from the hand of Fate.

Davis, the coachman, ever mindful of his horses, had drawn up at the curb in perplexity. A moment later a footman was at the carriage door, asking if they should turn homeward.

“No, no, not home yet!” she ordered, with the half-cruel inconsideration of a woman immured in her own unhappiness. “Tell Davis to drive up through the Park first, and then down by way of the Avenue!”

Night had settled over the tired city, and a steady stream of homeward trending carriages and motor-cars flowed past them into the quieter regions of the upper town. A belated horseman or two clattered by on the hard asphalt. The lamp-strewn darkness of Central Park widened out into lonely silences before them.

“What shall we do?” she whispered again, as they threaded their way through the wooded gloom and the misty slopes of verdure. She was more at home there, she felt; it seemed to enisle them in a solitude through which none of earth’s disheartening sordidnesses could pass. That, she vaguely surmised, was why all lovers had loved gardens. She looked up at Dorat, as she felt his shielding arm about her.

“There is only one thing, now, for us to do,” he said, as she sank back on his shoulder once more. “Only one thing, as I said from the first!”

“Dear and dearest, what is it?”

“We must be together, for all time!”

“But how?”

“You must marry me, beloved!”

It was her sex, and not her heart, that spoke, as she answered him.

“But I am afraid, Dorat,” she said tremulously.

“You are tired!” he soothed her.

“We must wait—oh, we must wait for a long time!” she persisted.

“But why are we to wait?” he demanded.

She held up before him the black-gloved hands, and said nothing. He understood, however.

“But *how* am I to wait?” he cried. “I have always needed and wanted you, but now I can’t live without you!”

He, too, held up a hand, his wounded left hand.

She, until then, had forgotten to remember. He had remembered to forget. Still again that creeping sense of dissatisfaction, of guilt at the inopportuneness of their avowals, took possession of her. She wondered if in all life there could be no supreme moment where the rose of happiness swung without its inner canker of memory.

“We must wait—we must learn to wait a little, my own,” she tried to plead with him. “You, for a little while, must go back to your work——”

“What work?” he asked, and his hand fell as he looked at her.

“Why, your music,” she began.

“I have no music!” he cried.

The pitiful look on his remembering face quite overcame her, and she caught him to her with an ardor that was almost maternal.

“Oh, you must not give that up,” she declared passionately. “If you have a shred of love left for me, don’t lash me with the thought of that! You are still the master you were. You must go back and *create*. You were only the interpreter before; now you must find and make your own song!”

“But there is no proof that I can! I have nothing to show that I am able to compose.”

“But you must *make* the proof that you can! See, there is the *Im Wald* sonata! Yes, begin with the *Im Wald*. Make that a test. Make that a proof that I have not been, that I am not to be, a blight to your life!”

He looked at her, long and earnestly, in some way infected by the fire of her enthusiasm. He opened his lips to demur and object, but she muffled his mouth with her hand.

“Then I could honor and love you all my life!” she cried, as she waved back his extended arm, with an imperiousness that was almost disdain.

“*I can—and I will!*” he answered out of the silence that fell over them.

And as he spoke, it seemed to the woman at his side, the childish forlornness went out of his face, the sense of desolation that had hung over his slender shoulders seemed to ebb away. Yet it was that very sense of helplessness and loneliness, she told herself, that had conquered and overcome her. It had, mysteriously and yet pregnantly, brought him nearer to her. And now with her own hands she was thrusting him once more up to those heights where he would stand so menacingly alone, where she could neither follow nor understand him.

It was only the warmth of his hand-clasp, and the caress of gratitude that he flung to her, that atoned for her fleeting moment of deprivation. She tried to tell herself, as she surrendered to the arm of the strong man, already asserting his mastery, that she had always been too moody and wayward and headstrong. She would be humbler, and exact and expect less. She would wait, passively, for some ultimate subjugation; unfathomed liberties still lay in that final surrender.

“You are not unhappy now?” she asked, at last, when, after telling her of what he had determined to do, an intimate silence of perfect understanding had fallen between them.

“No—not now,” he answered, as he kissed her smiling mouth, neither passionately nor yet perfunctorily, as they swung into Fifth avenue and drove homeward through the darkness.

## VIII

Jean Dorat’s *Im Wald* sonata descended on the musical world like a bolt out of a clear sky. It came so unheralded, so unlooked for, that all New York woke up one morning, rubbed its eyes, and discovered a new maker of music in its midst.

With Dorat himself it was somewhat different. For five weeks of indecision, of ineffectual vacillation, of despairing and useless effort, he had struggled and fought with the score. Once he tore it to shreds and scattered it wrathfully about the room. Twice Charlotte had rescued it, crumpled and twisted, from the waste-paper basket. She had said little, but he understood how she felt. He knew that he had to fight it out alone. Even Meran himself

—Meran the grim, yet ever gentle—kept discreetly away from him, so irritable and nervous and overwrought did those five weeks of groping effort leave his friend Dorat.

It was a wet and gusty day of the sixth week that the opening movement made itself clear to the young composer. Then he locked himself in with his inspiration—for three days he had been ill and peevish and pallid—and his meals were thrust in to him, timorously, as they might have been proffered to a caged animal. Meran and Charlotte would talk in half-whispers outside the barred door, overhearing, now and then, broken chords and the pounding of keys and a shocking curse or two of sheer wrath and the sound of the restless feet as they paced the floor—all betraying to them just how passionately Dorat was wrestling with his angel.

Even when, in a fine flush of triumphant enthusiasm, the score was completed the joy of the conquest was short-lived. In the sobering chill of reaction new faults were uncovered, fresh weaknesses were seen, and again the structure was torn apart and rebuilt.

The time came, however, when Dorat vowed he could do nothing more with it, that he was sick and tired of the very sound of it, that it would have to go out as it was, to sink or swim. He didn't much care, anyway; he was tired, and he wanted to rest.

It was arranged that Pachmann, in two weeks' time, was to play the new sonata at his second Carnegie Hall recital. Dorat himself had protested that he could never endure hearing it from the hands of another, that whether played well or ill it would only add to his unhappiness. But on the day of the concert itself he yielded to Charlotte's pleading, and together they slipped into orchestra chairs, at the end of the third number, and sat unknown and unrecognized at the back of the hall.

Pachmann was playing the Bach Chromatic Fantasia; as they settled themselves, playing it with surpassing beauty, it seemed to Charlotte, making what had always appeared to her a mere scholastic achievement now a revelation of feeling and poetry under his adroit fingers. But Dorat looked troubled. He complained, pettishly almost, it seemed to the woman at his side, of the want of judgment in putting the *Im Wald* next to Bach.

A silence fell on the hall as the opening notes of the new sonata drifted out over the audience. A quiver of apprehension, of delight, of admiration mingled with anxiety, swept through Charlotte as she listened. Her mind flew back to the day of the inception of *Im Wald*, to the scene that had followed. It was the heart of the man she loved speaking out to her, the voice



of love and longing raised above all earthly conditions, speaking from spirit to answering spirit.

But was it? she suddenly asked herself, as she glanced at Dorat, rapt, unremembering, unseeing beside her. She recalled what he had said several days before, about the outsider always trying to read meanings into music. He had even cited Rubinstein's disgust with Tolstoi, over the fallacies of the Kreutzer Sonata, and had mocked at the many lay efforts to read words and ideas into Mendelssohn's *Lieder Ohne Worte*.

No, she decided, he had not spoken of her or to her. *She* was no more a part of it than the bread and meat he had eaten and forgotten, that last mad week when he was rounding it out into a finished whole.

She gazed at him where he sat listening, crumpled up in his seat, as white as paper. He neither saw nor felt the hand that lay on his arm, almost imploringly. He was detached, disembodied; she felt that he had left her at the sullen gates of some lost Eden of feeling into which she could not enter. He was above and beyond her. She felt desolately alone. She wondered if it was to be only in his earthlier moments that she was to know his companionship, if most of his life was still to be spent on these cold heights of abstraction.

She glanced down at the programme again, and a second, more complicated emotion took possession of her. She read the words again, as though they had taken on new meaning:

SONATA

JEAN DORAT

*(For the first time)*

Allegro

*Im Wald*

Adagio

*Abschied*

Allegretto Prestissimo

*Warum?*

She looked at Dorat once more, as he leaned forward in his seat, listening. There was none of the old platform attitudinizing about him now. He was no longer the reserved and ceremonial artist of Paris; he was the grown-up canal boy from Lachine. She saw him denuded of every saving mist of emotion. He was an anxious and nervous and moist-browed man,

fretting at what seemed a fellow-man's deficient interpretation of his music, inwardly fuming at unsatisfying execution. Struggle as she might against the memory, she could not help recalling his first private recital in New York, where, at the end, he had imperiously ordered the lights lowered, and had played Chopin's Funeral March, "as a token to his dead master, Rubinstein," it had been whispered about. When the music had ended, and the burst of applause had come, and had been repeated and repeated, he still sat at the piano with bowed head. She even felt sure they were tears of actual grief that she had seen running down his bowed face, yet afterward he had confessed to her that Rubinstein had given him only five lessons altogether, and then had sent him away unceremoniously, with the crushing dictum that he was both too young and too stupid ever to learn the piano.

Yet as she listened to the last movement of the *Im Wald*, a movement that seemed one cry of passion and of protest against fate, she tried to find excuses for him. To seek and find beauty was no little thing, she told herself, at whatever cost it was, quest and conquest together. Perhaps, after all, it was jealousy, perhaps it was selfishness—if he failed, it was only the failure that went with vast accomplishment; if he had defects, they were only the great defects that went with great character.

For the final movement had ended; the burst of applause that filled the house shook the last leaf of disquiet from her mind. They had tired of clapping now, and were standing in a body, waving and shouting, while Pachmann came back and forth, and bowed. Then he threw up his hands to intimate that Dorat was not present, while still he bowed and retired, and was again recalled.

Pachmann's manager came forward and made a little speech, regretting that Dorat was not among them to share in his justly won triumph, and promising that the sonata would be repeated at the third recital, in a fortnight's time. Whereupon the applause began once more, until the audience, exhausted, settled back again.

It was not until then that Dorat noticed the little black-gloved hand resting on his arm. He caught it up and crushed it between his two hands, impulsively, happily. There was a babble of talk about them. Through it she heard always the name Dorat, Dorat, Dorat. Women behind her were talking of his greatness. Other women in front of her were discussing his career.

He was theirs, and not hers, she inwardly cried, with a sudden pang of jealous fear. He did not belong to her; he was the world's, everybody's. She would have only the shell of him, the empty body; he must pour his heart

and life out to them. She thought she had outlived her old fear of misunderstanding him, of failing to read his aims and grasp his thoughts and feelings. But two seats ahead of her a woman sat sobbing convulsively; every tear was a tribute to the beauty of Dorat's music. Yet she felt that she hated that woman; and she remembered, too, that her own eyes were dry.

"That is you, dear, you," he was saying to her. "All that is beautiful in it comes through *you!*"

She tried to return Dorat's warm pressure, but her fingers seemed limp and lifeless.

"It was for you; it was to win you!" he whispered happily.

She nodded her head, for a sudden lump had come in her throat and seemed choking her.

"Won't it do, my own?" he pleaded.

How she wanted him; how she wanted all of him! She was blind and mad! She had nothing but love for him, consuming, all-powerful, jealous in its passion to hold and guard him.

"Won't it do, my own?" he repeated, leaning close to her and whispering the words almost in her ear.

"Yes," she answered inadequately. "Yes."

Then she startled and perplexed him with a sudden and quite unlooked-for gush of tears. In the gloomy passageway, as they groped their way out, she stooped down and, catching up his hand, kissed it with a little abandoned sigh of helplessness.

There was something so humbled, so resigned in the touch that he looked at her in wonder.

"Charlotte, what is it?" he asked.

"It's—it's only love, I think," she answered.

## IX

The same newspapers which contained the notices of Jean Dorat's success in a new field of music also announced that Mrs. Stephen Cranfill was about to sail for Europe. Both Cedarhurst and her Fifth avenue house, it was explained, would remain closed for at least a year. Her health, since the

tragic death of her husband, had been far from satisfactory, and her physicians had advised that she recoup for a Winter at least in some of the quieter of the Continental watering-places.

In three weeks Dorat followed her abroad, and they met in London. His passage had been a stormy one, and the wretchedness of his seasickness was still stamped on his fatigued and worn-looking face.

The meeting, too, was untimely, for Charlotte had just signed certain legal papers, made necessary through the death of her husband, and the room seemed cramped and draped with all the huddled old memories of her former life.

“I have come to you—for good!” Dorat said, not allowing himself to be chilled by the coldness of her look and touch.

She felt herself on the brink of a great happiness, and yet she seemed unable to make the move which would fling her out into its depths. She looked up at him out of silent and brooding eyes. She once more wondered if it was the old New England conscience turning in its grave.

Then she remembered how desolate and empty her three weeks of waiting had been, and compellingly, henceforth, she felt the need of him and his love.

“I could not have waited another day,” he said, as he noticed her mute little gesture, and interpreted it as excess of emotion, captivated by the very seeming poverty of her language of love.

She felt the old anesthesia as his lips met hers, and, once in his arms, all the old scruples seemed forgotten, and she was murmuring how she loved him, and how she had missed him.

Three days later they were married, quietly, on an afternoon of clearing weather. The sun, through the misty London air, seemed warm and balmy, like the sun of Spring itself, as they came into the bright light from the dimness of the chapel. Charlotte cried a little, as they drove homeward, although she tried to tell herself that the day had in every way been auspicious.

She watched, anxiously and fearfully, for some slightest change of tone or attitude in Dorat; but he was even more tender and quietly thoughtful than before. After all, she argued with herself, in her hour of final surrender, the great artist must always be the great lover. It was only that her whole nature was still in revolt against the past; it was that alone which made her still question and probe and hesitate, she inwardly averred. It was through that

alone that she had not come to her lover so young and virginal as she might have done.

From London Dorat and Charlotte started out for a month's cruise in Mediterranean waters.

The four weeks of this cruise always remained dream-like to Charlotte; it was so much more quietly happy than she had ever dared to hope. It seemed to obliterate the past, and day by day steeped her in some greater calm of supreme contentment. It seemed the complete quiet and happiness of repose in passion. In that mysterious love languor she looked for no more than the moment gave. It brought with it, not a sense of bondage, but one of freedom. Even her hope for the future grew fixed and strong. The one thing that frightened her a little was her own composure, her own tranquillity of mood and feeling. On deck, at times, she would study Dorat unobserved, and she knew and felt that he was happy; that in every way she had fulfilled all his hopes and expectations. He was now reality to her, a human of the humans. It was the man, the man himself, she had been living and breathing and walking beside; and she was no longer oppressed by the old feeling of his flame-like insubstantiality, of his elusive and volatile artist's temperament.

She could see, too, that Dorat was as happy as she herself. If she had been grateful for some mysterious release and for change of scene, he in turn was glad of idleness and rest. With renewing strength, too, his old-time spirit came back to him, and he fell to telling her, light-heartedly, of his early trials and experiences, of the comedies and little tragedies of his student days, of his friends and his adventures in Paris. In fact, it was of Paris that he talked most, and in her secret heart of hearts she grew a little afraid of that city and its memories for him. When, unexpectedly, they decided to linger a few weeks in Palermo, she was not altogether surprised that Dorat had a grand piano and a writing-desk moved into their apartment, for already she could detect faint signs of his returning hunger for work.

The gardens of their rented villa were quite large enough for them to stroll and wander about in, by day, if they so desired. But Monreale and the heights of Monte Pellegrino often lured them beyond their own walls, and once or twice a week they hired donkeys, and from the summit feasted on the matchless blue of Conca d'Oro, and the islands of the Sicilian Apennines, and the white loveliness of Palermo surrounded by groves of orange-trees and palms. Once, at a caprice of Dorat's, they slept at the monastery of Santa Rosalia, and the musician, maimed hand and all, charmed the monks by playing for them on the great old organ.

Some compressed and softer side of Charlotte seemed to expand in the wonderful Southern loveliness of sea and land and mountain which surrounded her. The exuberant Southern growths, the luxuriant beauty and color, the glory of sunset and sunrise, of flower and tree and ruin, had in some way taken, as she put it, "the New England chill out of her bones." Life seemed drenched and heavy with beauty. The day seemed to carry with it its own delight and its own fulfillment.

It was as she closed the villa windows one night—for the odors of the garden flowers were so strong they could not sleep in the overpowering heaviness of them—that Dorat came to her side and gazed with her out over the darkening land and paling water.

"Did you know this was the land," he asked her, "that moved Goethe to write 'Kennst du das Land?'"

"It is no wonder!" she answered, as she lingered at the window with the casement half-closed.

Then they both looked northward, and sighed happily. His kiss, as she closed the window for the night, had all the rapture of the first touch of their awakening love. She was happier than she deserved.

Never had she seemed more beautiful to Dorat as during those tranquil days in the midst of their Sicilian garden. She seemed to melt and merge into something so sweetly mobile, so softly pliant and yielding, that every move and touch of her body seemed endearing and subjugating. It was only when away from her, during her brief absences, that a new and ever-growing sense of unrest crept over her husband. He fell into the habit of talking more and more of Paris, of friends and artists there, of what they should do when once settled. Yet the more he talked of Paris the more that vast city became a dread to the troubled heart of Charlotte.

They were so happy now, she pleaded, why not remain as long as they could? It was their honeymoon; it was the one time of supreme happiness in all their life. So why give it up until forced to do so?

She thought to appease his restlessness by a change of scene; so once more they made ready to journey eastward, for a week or two at Taormina.

Monte Pellegrino stood out huge and purple against the soft rose flush of the early dawn on the morning of their departure. As they watched, the first shafts of the rising sun touched the white line of the sleeping city, shone tenderly on the dark palms, on the great elms and the clustered gloom of the orange groves. The sky turned from rose to gold and from gold to azure,

until it hung a dome of cobalt over a sea of even deeper hue. It seemed too exquisite to forsake, Charlotte felt, as they watched the white city recede further and further, become a white speck on the skyline, and then sink altogether out of sight.

“Good-bye, happiness, good-bye,” she called back, as she leaned out over the rail.

Yet her fears proved unfounded, for she and Dorat seemed only drifting from beauty to beauty. They stayed only a week at Taormina, but it was a week of unbroken contentment. One placid evening as they were steaming nearer and nearer the Greek isles, on a sea of perfect calm, the far-away tones of a guitar reached her ears.

A golden moon was floating slowly up in the east, the sea was azure and purple, as motionless as the sky above them. Through the gathering darkness they heard the sound of song and then a sudden sense of overpowering sweetness smote her as two boats drifted by, laden to their bulwarks with Parma violets.

A feeling of passionate languor stole over her, a feeling not unlike that she had known, she remembered, when Dorat had once played Chopin to her and mysteriously made her body drunk with love.

She reached out for him impetuously, and crushed his hand between her hot palms.

“What are you thinking of?” he asked.

He stroked the gold-brown hair that crowned the head fallen back into his lap, and gazed eastward at the rising moon.

“And you?” she asked.

“I was thinking of Paris, of work, of what you and I shall have to do before long,” he said, after a silence. “I was thinking that I might do something big—that I might write an opera!”

“Must we go?” she pleaded still again.

“Dear and dearest” (he had caught the phrase from her), “we must. And the sooner the better.”

She sighed heavily. It was not that he was tired of love, she told herself; it was only that he was tired of idleness. The young tiger had known his first taste of blood; she, in her madness, had flung him his first bait, and now he must be stalking and hunting through all the world for fame.

It was one soft and starlit night at Ragusa that he brought up the thought of Paris again.

“Paris always seems to teach what Art is,” he told her. “And it teaches what life is, too. It’s the only city that seems to lift the soul up to the praise of life—and that, after all, is Art! Every café there is a sort of college. Only, instead of studying old books, you can sit and study life, life, always new! It’s the only city where you can exile yourself in front of an inn and look down on life as a picture, and love the sound of it as one loves music! What it is, or why it is, I don’t know; but it’s there, and it always seems calling me back!”

“Must we go back?” she whispered wistfully.

He nodded the head she had drawn down to her brooding face.

“Then kiss me!” she said incongruously, and locked her arms about his bent head, as though in a farewell, and held him there passionately.

## X

Once back in Paris Dorat fell on his work with a ferocity that seemed to the wondering Charlotte almost tigerish. She had thought, as they first settled themselves in their apartment on the avenue du Bois de Boulogne, that in certain ways she would still be able to share Dorat’s labors with him. In this, however, she was soon disillusioned.

She began to see that his new ambition demanded both mental and bodily freedom. He had even been forced to tell her, with delicacy and gentleness enough, that their old habit of day-long companionship must be broken. It was the opera that he was now struggling with, he confessed to her; it was to bear the title of “Hero and Leander.” If only his scores could be worked out to the end after the manner in which he had begun them, then she would be able to forgive him; he laughingly chided her for shutting himself up all morning, like a hermit in his cave, day after day.

It troubled her a little when she discovered that for weeks past he had been thinking and brooding about this new opera, and that even his strangely expressed wish to continue their cruise to the Hellespont had been rooted only in self-interest, in a longing to see the spot where his Hero and Leander had once lived and died.



Through the very days during which he had seemed so much her own the thin edge of this widening wedge of art had already been cleaving their lives, she told herself, one gray and rainy afternoon when she discovered that her husband, without consulting her, had arranged an apartment at the top of the house for his music-room. There, from eight until one, he would work undisturbed; there he would be strictly alone.

It was foolish and selfish, she tried to tell herself, to cry out against Dorat's natural devotion to his work. But they had been so much together; their lives and thoughts and feelings had grown so intertwined during those months of early idleness and intimacy, that now her loneliness weighed heavily upon her.

She tried to struggle against these feelings, but in vain. She succeeded, however, in hiding her hours of depression, even occasional tears, from her husband, though day by day he more and more noticed the sense of constraint and moodiness that hung over her.

"I have it," he said one day, suddenly looking up from the score he had brought down with him to the luncheon-table. "Why not study with Meran? Why not take up your painting again?"

The suggestion appealed to Charlotte. It would not only give her new interests, but it might, in time, put her on a more equal standing with Dorat. She, like her husband, would be a disciple of that exacting mistress, Art. It would serve, perhaps, to bring more happily together their slowly divorcing thoughts and interests and feelings.

So it was arranged that Charlotte should go three days out of the week to the atelier of Meran in the Boulevard Haussmann, for criticism and drawing.

In one thing she had found her fears of Dorat and his city life quite groundless. It had been the distractions and excitements of Paris that she had feared. She had expected to find Dorat's apartments the centre of continuous gaiety and movement; she had looked for his countless friends to be carrying him off night and day. Yet she was now being daily astonished by the simplicity of his life. He had objected to luxurious apartments; he wanted to live simply and freely. He had set his face against "hotel" life, and from the first had seemed perfectly content in the cold and lonely rooms of their rented apartment. He had many friends, it was true, but most of them seemed his old studio and atelier comrades. She had no fear of them, she knew; and although she was a little bewildered by the apparent coolness and ease with which these men and women of the studios spoke of love and liaisons, no half-expected barbed arrow as to Dorat's previous life ever

reached her breast. In fact, as she grew to know him more minutely and completely, she decided in secret that any man who had so left behind him the mere ventral delights of life was very unlikely to confront her with any ghosts of old indiscretions. And in this she was not amiss. Dorat had never been a loose liver.

Charlotte plunged into her work valiantly, and soon grew to take a quiet delight in her mornings with Meran. His was a beautiful old studio, belittered with rugs and canvases, tapestries and curios; and from the high, many-paned windows could be seen a wide view of Paris, with Montmartre in the centre distance.

“You came to me as a pupil?” Meran had said to her, not unkindly, looking at her in some perplexity. She had always liked this gray-bearded man of few words. She had long since decided that he was as soft-hearted as he was hard-headed.

She told him where and how she had studied before.

“But, my dear madam, I have never before taken a pupil. I would scarcely know how to treat one. I work here day after day, like a bear in a cave, without seeing a soul but my model!”

Then they were *all* like bears in a cave, decided Charlotte.

“Well, I’ll come and stir up the cage,” she laughed back at him. And true to her word, she made it a habit to carry an armful of flowers up to the luxurious yet dusty old studio three times a week.

“And what a dear old polar bear he is!” she confessed later to Dorat, as she told him of her conviction that Meran had thought her a mere idler, and had suggested that she start with chalk and portfolios, and later had even seemed brusquely satisfied with her brush-work. He had suggested, too, that she come every morning for a shorter lesson, if need be.

“Will you be jealous, dear and dearest?” she asked, as she pushed her fingers up through the tangled mass of his russet-brown hair.

He laughed and kissed her.

“There’s no man in Paris I would trust before Meran. And there’s no woman in the world I would trust more than you!”

Then he led her gaily up to his music-room and showed her the score of his completed first act of “Hero and Leander.” They picked out the airs together at the piano, and Charlotte even attempted one of the solos, her husband beating time with a roll of music.

“Ah, wait until you hear Mlle. Beauharnais sing that!” he cried, as he flung down his roll of music.

“Who is Mlle. Beauharnais?” asked Charlotte, as she turned the pages of the score.

“My saving angel, I hope,” answered Dorat, as he dashed down a few notes that had just come to him. “My saving angel,” he repeated absently, as he turned to the piano. “She is the first soprano at the Opéra, you know!”

“Oh!” said his wife half-wearily, and she suddenly remembered that her morning work had left her tired and restless.

“Dorat, you *must* have Marcelle keep a fire in this room when you’re here working. It’s as cold as charity!”

“I never notice it,” he answered from the piano.

She looked at him curiously. She felt cheated at the thought that she was denied those inner fires at which he could so readily warm himself.

## XI

The weeks slipped away, and Dorat rewrote scene after scene of “Hero and Leander,” added new touches to the opera, and in the end rescored the entire manuscript.

Charlotte’s earlier secret distaste for his Parisian friends seemed to wear away as the Winter advanced, although she was still haunted by the feeling of being a foreigner among foreigners, and often speculated in secret on what might be happening in New York, or at Cedarhurst, at some particular moment of abstraction. Saturday after Saturday, however, she found herself among the gay and distinguished circle which Dorat’s confrères in general and the Princess Branicka in particular always gathered about them—students of the Beaux-Arts, a handful of diplomats, a scattering of wandering English noblemen, gay young fellows from the American quarter, long-haired Polish musicians, and resplendent actresses and singers from the Odéon and the Opéra.

Charlotte grew fond of some satisfying half-excitement in the flash and stir of these gatherings. She even noticed, a little to her inward distress, that from the new circle into which she was merging she had caught a new openness of mind. It gave her, however, some outlet for her old-time audaciousness of spirit.

“I’m suffering from ingrowing American conscience!” she once confessed to Dorat.

She no longer felt abashed before the half-draped models of the studios; she no longer knew any fleeting prick of conscience at the growing tenderness with which Meran spoke and worked and talked with her. When her own receptions had duly begun she carried them off with an imperious dash and flush of excitement that soon won for her the name of being one of the most American of Parisian hostesses.

“We are good fellows, all of us,” she said to Meran one night, after an evening of unusual romping—Dorat was busy on the last act of his “Hero and Leander”—and the last of her guests were taking themselves off.

“We’re good fellows, all of us, so why can’t we get a little fun out of life?”

“Yes, why shouldn’t we?” said Meran, as he stooped to kiss her hand. Some pregnant inflection of his voice caused Charlotte to flash a look of half-angry inquiry at him. Yet he went away so quietly, so humbly, that she began to think she had done him an injustice.

On the following day, when she went for her lesson, Meran was not in his studio. A quick sense of disappointment crept over her at this discovery; just why she did not know.

She walked homeward listlessly. Her thoughts, all that morning, had been running more poignantly than ever back to her earlier life, and again she had caught herself wondering just what was taking place at home (she still thought of New York as home), and if many changes had befallen the old faces and the old circles and the old scenes.

She was surprised, as the house door opened for her, to find the apartment flooded with the full notes of a woman’s soprano voice, pulsating down from Dorat’s music-room.

She realized with a pang just what it meant. “Hero and Leander” was completed; the woman from the Opéra was going over the score.

And Dorat had not even told her! There indeed was a sign of just how far he had let himself drift away from his wife. She had filled the siphon, and nothing more; the natural flow of mental labor had drained away his emotion and sympathy. He had told her that no man could serve two masters; he was elbowing her aside, not only in his labor, but in his hours of leisure.

She stood listening to the compelling, pulsing soprano. Then, in some way caught by the charm of the music, she mounted the stairs and made her way to the music-room.

“Now, again, my dear Natalie!” Dorat was saying excitedly in French. “Now, again, with more stress and spirit in the finale!”

Charlotte stepped into the room. They stood with their backs to her, Dorat at the piano, the singer beside him. It was Mlle. Beauharnais.

Charlotte listened, breathless, as the impassioned love-song broke from the flexible, well-trained throat and the flood of music once more filled the all but empty room. She could see Dorat imparting rhythm to the passage by a nervous little movement of the hand and body; she could feel the subtle spirit which seemed to make the singer and player one, as the movement reached its climax and died away in a burst of passion.

“Adorable, Natalie, adorable!” cried the musician, as he caught the singer and kissed her excitedly on either cheek. “*Now* you are giving a soul to the music!”

An almost soundless little gasp burst from the throat of the woman standing beside the door, with one hand clutching at the swaying portière.

As through a mist she saw Beauharnais put two friendly hands on her husband’s arm laughingly, while they turned back to the score and once more struggled with the aria.

Charlotte groped her way from the room. It meant nothing, she told herself pantingly, and yet it meant so much. She was alone in the world, friendless and unloved. She tried to lash herself into a fury of jealous rage, even while she confessed to herself the utter impersonality of Dorat’s action. This was why he could be happy and contented without her! He would call it all the *camaraderie* of the artist; he would laugh at it and say that she was as *exigeante* as ever.

As she groped her way down through the quiet halls she met a servant and Bartet, the tenor. That gentleman was all bows and apologies for being so late—he had been unavoidably detained at the Opéra.

Charlotte sent him on his way up to the music-room with a far-away frigidity of voice and iciness of manner that left him gasping a little as he made his escape. Then she swept into her room and, having securely locked the door, surrendered herself to the inconsequence of many hot and bitter tears.

That night at dinner no trace of the tempest through which she had passed remained on her face. She waited, however, with an almost tragic alertness of attention, for Dorat's welcoming kiss. It seemed neither colder nor warmer than that of other evenings; it left everything still in the balance.

"Has your day been happy, dear and dearest?" Dorat asked her, wondering at the sustained silence, so unusual with her.

She had been thinking of America, of New York, calling back to her mind faces and scenes, the familiar brown-stone cañones, the wavering double line of Fifth avenue arc-lights, the homelier warmth of the New World homes.

"Happy enough!" she said. She looked up from her plate and smiled with her lips, but the unparticipating New England eyes remained cold.

"And Meran, how is he?"

She was on the point of telling Dorat that she had failed to find Meran at home that morning; but on second thoughts she decided not to do so.

"Meran grows more delightful, more kindly, day by day," she said to him instead. "And I love him more and more."

Dorat raised his eyebrows; then laughed his easy little laugh.

"And the work, how does it go?" he continued, after a pause.

He was catechizing her as he might a schoolgirl.

She flung down her knife and fork with an impetuous little cry.

"Work! I'm sick and tired of it! I can never do anything at it! *I'm not an artist*, and I never will be one!"

He looked up, startled.

"I—I tell you, Jean, tubes and brushes and things like that can *never* take the emptiness out of life for me!"

"Charlotte!"

At one time, she felt, he would have come to her. Now he sat studying her with cold and wondering eyes. And this was her Dorat, her lover and husband! It was not the love of a woman such as she was that he demanded. He was killing it in her. It was only cat's love that he wanted—something soft and purring, for his hand to fall down to in a moment of idleness. But she was losing him, she was losing him, was the thought that danced and pirouetted insanely in the background of her consciousness.

“Oh, Jean,” she suddenly began to plead, her passionate eyes close to his face, “can’t we take a holiday, for a week, for two weeks? Can’t just you and I slip away for a week or two, to Palermo, where we were so happy?”

She felt, perversely enough, that the old setting might still again frame the old contentment of heart and mind.

“But how could we, now?” Dorat asked. She was as exigent as a child.

“But why not?” More and more she was beginning to feel that she would lose him for all time if no sudden break came in the present trend of things.

“But there is the opera! That will go on sometime within a few weeks! It’s impossible, Charlotte! It’s almost absurd!”

“Then not even for my happiness, not even when you know it’s my profoundest wish—” she broke off despairingly. “Oh, this is the penalty! This is what I suffer for—for one false move, for one mistake!”

The strident hardness of her voice left him amazed. Her eyes were flashing back at him angrily. It crept through her mind, as she gazed at him, that the marriage she had thought was to complete and perfect her was in reality deforming and demeaning her. For there she stood, bitter, rebellious, exacting, irritable, draped in a sudden selfishness which even she herself could see and hate! That egoistic individualism which had once made her seem so charmingly audacious now made her narrow and exacting; she was more than the passive flowering of a soft and padded environment, she was a wilful and arbitrary woman consumed with a humiliating jealousy which she could not understand.

Dorat looked back at her studiously; he noticed for the first time the tender hollow that had come under either delicate cheek-bone, the half-wistful shadows that hung under the wide, gray-blue eyes.

“Charlotte, are you ill?” he demanded.

“No, I’m not ill,” she cried back at him. “It is something worse than illness!”

What a tangle of imperiousness and caprice, of beauty and wilfulness she was, thought Dorat, as he saw the impending tears on her eyelashes.

He arose from his chair and came and stood beside her, catching her resisting hands in his.

“Dear and dearest,” he said, slowly and quietly, “I want you to remember that I am passing through a rather trying period. I have been fatigued and

frustrated and disappointed. You know how delighted some of my enemies would be if I should fail with this opera! Then why not bear with me a little while? Why not help and not hinder me?"

"Help you? How can I help you? It's Beauharnais you need to plead with, I should think!"

"Beauharnais? Why do you mention her?"

"Beauharnais—why do you caress her?" she flashed back at him.

He passed to the other side of the table, the better to see her face.

"Then, this is why—" he began.

"No, it's *not* why! It's only one of many other things! If you *must* kiss these women, what's that to me?"

"Charlotte, we are both ridiculous. Natalie Beauharnais is to be my *prima donna*. She has never been anything to me; she never could be anything to me—but a friend. I need her for my work. She is everything to my success!"

He seemed to grow suddenly angry at the thought that all such demeaning explanations were even demanded of him.

"Why, instead of suspecting her and antagonizing her, you—you ought to be helping me to conciliate and win her, helping me to get her sympathy, her enthusiasm!"

"And make everything grist for the mill!" she mocked.

"You ought to be helping *me*, I say, instead of trying to mar everything with your moods!"

"You mean for me to kiss her on one cheek while you salute her on the other!"

"This is unjust!" rejoined her husband.

"*Will you take me to Palermo?*" she reiterated, in her inconsequential madness.

He leaned forward and gazed at her across the narrow table.

"Do you insist?" he demanded, with a sudden pallor on his face.

She moved her head; it meant that she did.

He smote the board suddenly with his clenched fist.



“Then we shall go to Palermo, you and I! We shall go, and we shall have our holiday! But I warn you beforehand what it will mean. It will mean defeat for me and my work, and some fine afternoon it may mean ennui; and sometime still later it may mean weariness and—and even worse!”

“You threaten me?” she cried.

“No. I love you, Charlotte; I always have loved you. But any man must resent a woman’s moods and caprices—however he may once have cared for her—coming between him and his life’s work. If you insist that we go off on this mad excursion——”

“Stop,” she cried scornfully. “It is not at all necessary. I need not go alone.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean just what I say, and more. I mean I have been meek and quiet and humble for months and months; I mean that I’m getting tired and sick of being an incident in your life, a sort of accident in petticoats in your affairs. I have been a mouse, hiding about the dark corners of your ambition, getting the crumbs that you let fall. I tell you, Dorat, I am not *made* that way! I can’t live that sort of life! I want to see some end, some meaning, to my existence! I have got to give myself up to something or somebody!”

He sat back, gasping at the unlooked-for outburst, which left her white and shaking.

“That is the talk of a— Charlotte, do you know and understand just what you are saying?”

“Every word!”

“Then,” he cried, rising to his feet once more, “then I take back what I have said. We will not go to Palermo, either you or I!”

He saw the steel-like challenge in her flashing eye and something acid and biting beneath her defiant laugh.

“But I *shall* go!” she insisted.

“Then it will be for good—forever!” he declared, as he smote the table again. He looked at her for a moment—it seemed with a look of hate—then he got up and left the room, white and sick and shaken.

Like all women, Charlotte demanded that her husband should be a despot. But she further ordained, and here once more she was not unlike many of her sex, that he should be large-minded and benevolent in that despotism. She had scarcely dreamed that it was to be *his* desire which was to push beyond its frontier, that it was his life of thought and feeling which was to have its *terra incognita*.

During the day that followed their stormy scene at the dinner-table, when Dorat was struggling to the verge of exhaustion with the instrumentation of "Hero and Leander," the unhappy young wife had both time and chance enough to brood over what had taken place.

She could acknowledge to herself the fact that music, at its best, was a spiritual issue, and that all spiritual issues can be fought out only in loneliness and self-analysis. The only way to make him, then, would be to forsake him. She would at least have that balm for the bruise. When the rupture *did* come it would mean not only her own liberation, but his emancipation as an artist as well. It would even be doing him a service, she told herself perversely, as she tried to look out on life without thought of him.

He had not been altogether kind to her; he had not even been just to her. She, as a woman, had given up so much! It was with her, she felt, as though he had turned on a gas-jet, yet had struck no timely match to burn away the poisonous and stupefying fumes which otherwise might have lighted away the very gloom of life itself. He was slowly asphyxiating her with her own unclarifying idleness, her own unliberated passion. Indifference was the one thing she could not endure. She even wished, waywardly, that Dorat would give her some coarse and brutal cause for despising him. She *did* despise him, his eternal talk about his art, his narrowness of view, his contempt for the things that had once meant so much in her life. No; she had reached the Great Divide of existence!

The smoldering fire of her too compressed affectional nature, during the next few mornings, flung a smoke of bewilderment about the face of Meran. She had been wayward with him; she had been tender to him; she had gazed at him with wistful and questioning eyes, until all the joy and peace of life had gone out of that grim old artist's heart. But being both a man of the world and a man of honor, he gave no sign.

"Oh, *cher maître*, I am so unhappy!" she burst out, one bright and frosty morning, as she turned to draw on her gloves and take her departure from the studio.

“Beauty, madam, should never be a burden!” he laughed back at her evasively, as he scraped his palette.

Yet she had never seemed more beautiful to him, touched with some fleeting sense of tears, like April lowlands overhung by a rainbow, suggestive of softness, of deep-bosomed fecundity, of impending mild germinations, of brooding motherhood itself.

“Meran!”

He looked at her hesitatingly, then he came and stood before her. His eyes were still wide with questioning.

“Meran, can’t you help me?”

He moved toward her; then he closed his eyes. He stood motionless, his bewildered body the battleground of silent and contending forces.

Then, to wring the tragedy out of the trying moment, he bent ceremoniously and kissed her hand.

“Anything, Madame Dorat—I would do anything for you!”

Charlotte knew it, yet she was more merciless than she had imagined she could be. She knew she was mad, malignant, tigerish; but she could only hear the blood surging drunkenly and recklessly through her veins.

“Will you come with me—*will you take me to Palermo with you?*”

He stepped back from her, with his arms outthrust, as though to shield himself from some invisible impending blow. His face was as colorless as the canvas he had just stretched for her on the paint-bespattered little easel.

“I want you to!” she cried, following him and seeming to float into his reluctant arms.

She saw the anguish written on his face. But something within her, some power not herself, seemed lashing her on to desperation.

“You will, won’t you?” she pleaded in her girlish soft contralto.

“No!” he answered. “I will not!”

She found an inapposite joy in her power to move and torture him.

“I’m going to come back—*you will go—you can’t help it!*” she cried, from the doorway.

### XIII

Charlotte's most dominant or coherent feeling, once out in the open air and for the first time able to comprehend the situation, was one of passionate triumph. She had vindicated herself. She had shaken the torpidity out of life for all time. She wanted her freedom to breathe and climb, whatever the cost. She had taken it of old; and what she once was she could still be.

Then, as she drifted through the hard, Parisian sunlight, so lucid and sane and exacting, sitting back in her open carriage, a mood of scruples and self-questioning came over her. A moment before it had seemed that lips of seraphic softness had somewhere whispered for her to arise and live and claim her own. Now the words seemed to come hissing out of some too beguiling serpent-mouth. For the first time the enormity of her error came home to her. She was a meddler; she had always marred things! She was wrecking three lives: her own, Dorat's, Meran's!

She was abandoning everything that made her honest and upright and worthy as a woman. Once having essayed that ultimate step, no matter what liberation or happiness it brought her, she was doomed, at heart, to be one of those demi-mondaine beings who wandered homelessly and friendlessly about Southern Europe, trying to feather the nest of life with the pitifully meager down of their bedraggled Cupids. And *would* it bring her liberation and happiness? After all, what was Meran to her or she to Meran?

"Oh, Dorat, Dorat," she cried, in her unjust disjointedness of emotion, "why were you not a brute to me? Why can't you make me hate you or love you with my whole heart? Why can't you bully and bind and compel me? *You haven't half tattled and broken me!*"

Involuntarily her thoughtless finger went up to the little scar on her forehead, carefully hidden by the long waves of hair, parted boy-like, on the side.

She looked out at the bright and sunny city before her, and wondered how it would seem to her eyes in a month, in a year, from that day.

She was passing through the Quartier de l'Europe, and her gaze fell on a familiar-looking home of white stone. It was the hotel of Auguste Speridon, the artist and collector, the very house where a week before she had flashed her triumphant way through the reception-room, and danced her way into the heart of half official Paris, and had her sally and verbal duel with the brilliant and flamboyant Comte Gerard de Montesquieu, and had been brought away in the early hours of the morning by her tired and silent

husband, who had dropped in for a few minutes at the last, after a night's work on his eternal scores.

Something in life, she told herself, was making her hard and small and self-contained. Once, she had been only too ready to spur and trumpet him on to his work. *She* had been the serious and solemn and aspiring one then; it was he, she had once feared, who would prove the light and capricious spirit.

She drew in her breath, suddenly, with a little gasp of surprise, as she looked out over the sunlit street.

There, passing her in the open street, was Dorat himself. She fluttered a half-tremulous, half-hesitating hand at him. But he neither turned nor saw her. Under the shadow of the hooded street cab he looked white and frail and ill. He looked like an old man; he was no longer young! His head was bent forward and a little to one side, in his habitual attitude of abstraction.

A feeling of his isolation, his weariness of soul, his childlike need of companionship, crept through her. This was followed by a sudden, surging passion of half-motherly pity, of commiserating pardon for conditions that demanded no pardon, of longing to be with and near him.

She remembered, inconsequentially yet sharply enough, the formal marriage promises she had made to him in the little London chapel. She had promised, as her whole body thrilled with the pride and weight of it, to love and cherish him in sickness and in health. Yet what had she done? From the first, from the very first, she had been an ingrate and a marplot. She had made life hard and lonely and uphill for him. No, no; it was not Dorat that she hated; it was herself that she despised and was afraid of!

She ordered her driver to swing about and hurry back to Meran's apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann.

Once there, she winged her way up the stairs as though her life depended on it. Her area of revolt had known its purgation; the Vesuvian fires of temperament had risen and subsided. Now she was all meekness, contrition, wistfully yielding. The pendulum had swung forward and back again.

She found Meran pacing his studio floor.

It was a stormy scene, and an unhappy one, for both of them. Yet she almost joyed in the sting and the humiliation of it; each pang, she felt, was the price she was paying for her foolishness.

Meran, from first to last, lied to her astutely; valiantly declaring that he had taken it all for the play-acting it was, protesting he had waited for her return and repentance—and all the while his white face and unhappy eyes were giving the lie direct to what only the courageous mouth was saying. He was the friend he had always been, and nothing more.

At that she kissed him on both his cheeks, after the manner of the French, and tried to tell him, through her tears, how much bigger and truer men were than women.

“Let this be our secret,” she said to him, and her smile was like the flash of water through gloomy pines. “Oh, Meran, we must make this a sort of seal on our friendship!”

As she made her escape from him, jubilantly miserable, proudly humiliated, she suddenly remembered that just as she had kissed the cheeks of Meran so her husband had saluted Natalie Beauharnais, after the fashion of the land. The one wiped out the score of the other. They were now on an equal footing. Yet hers had been the less innocent touch, she knew, and from her, because of it, would have to come the more absolute atonement.

On the landing below Meran’s she paused in the hallway. Some English students in the atelier before her were singing a song to the tinkling music of zithers and guitars.

This is a spray the bird clung to,  
Making it blossom with pleasure,  
Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,  
Fit for her nest and her treasure.  
Oh, what a hope beyond measure  
Was the poor spray’s that the flying feet hung to—  
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

Charlotte instinctively gazed back up the gloomy stairway, and thought of Meran.

“But sometime he will learn to forgive me, I know,” she murmured.

Yet in a vague way she felt, as she passed down the stairs into the strong sunlight of the open street, that it was a dangerous thing to play with souls.

The open course of fate always seemed so frustrated with side-issues; the world went so crookedly always; in the whirlpools and backwaters of existence hopes and wishes and realities were forever getting so inextricably mixed and tangled and torn! Such were the thoughts that ran disjointedly through Charlotte's contrite and unhappy head, after a weary day of self-disgust and self-discovery.

She would have flown to Dorat on the wings of love, she would have hastened to him, open-armed and humble-hearted; but once more she found that emotion and opportunity did not always coincide. Dorat was not to be found. He was not at home. He was to be unearthed at none of his familiar haunts, and neither servants nor friends could enlighten Charlotte as to his whereabouts.

It was from the effusive little Signor Allio, the second tenor of the Opéra, whom she met by chance coming from the Princess Branicka's, that Charlotte learned the truth.

It came to her with a second and keener stab of pain, for it showed her how self-immured and illiberal she had been.

It was the night of "Hero and Leander's" rehearsal, the culminating point of all of Dorat's effort.

Charlotte flew after the disappearing Allio, and asked him how she might secure admission tickets to the rehearsal. There should be no trouble, the little tenor informed her. All that was necessary was a card from her own husband. The signora was much to be envied. She had the first claim on M. Dorat. Many women had begged in vain for cards from the great composer. There had been much talk. He could not say anything. But soon the world would know, and the signora would then be the proudest of women. It was wonderful, sublime. He could not say more, but she would see what she would see.

Charlotte, in desperation, went straight to Meran once more, and begged him to see her husband—she had been told that Dorat had neither slept nor eaten in two days—and to get a card and a line or two from him for admission to the final rehearsal.

This Meran dutifully set out to do, leaving Charlotte behind, to be tossed like a tennis-ball from court to court of opposing feelings, as she gazed out with unseeing eyes on the height of Montmartre.

"I cannot live with myself! That is the whole secret! All these years I have been trying to escape from something, and that something has been

myself. I have tried to lose myself in my puny little scraps of painting. I have tried to lose myself in love. And it has all been to escape from myself! I have been demanding eternal sun, and hating shade; and all the time I have been trying to leap away from my own shadow!”

The change that seemed taking place in her befell without warning. It came, though, with much unhappiness and many tears—dumb self-pleadings and expostulations, with withering self-shames, leading, in the end, to a buoyant and electrifying determination. She was no longer a girl. She was a woman, a woman still young in years, yet already with a touch of something autumnal falling about her. From that time forward, she told herself plaintively, she would have to treasure and cherish and guard, or she would lose what remained of life for her.

Meran came back with his card, and with the news that Dorat was like a tiger encaged. He was tearing his hair out, like a crazy man, storming and pounding and correcting. Truly, declared Meran, this music-making business was a terrible thing.

All the rest of that day Charlotte was oppressed by a sense of loneliness, against which she struggled and fought in vain.

Even Meran took note of her depression of spirits, contrasting as it did with some strange exaltation that shone in the deepened violet-blue of her eyes, and he put a tentative question or two to her, as they made their way together that evening, to the theatre.

“It ought not to hurt a strong man to be lonely, ought it, *cher maître?*” she asked, with her brusque inconsequentiality. “The strong have a right to be lonely!”

Meran groped out to find the trend of her busy thoughts, but no one current defined itself.

“It’s different with a woman!” she sighed, as they stepped into the gloomy *foyer*.

It took Charlotte several minutes to get accustomed to the almost complete darkness of the Opéra House. As she followed Meran to a seat in one of the amphitheatre stalls she felt grateful to him for his hint about wearing her furs. The chill of the place was like the chill of a huge tomb.

A venally officious attendant came up to them noiselessly and slipped a stool under Charlotte’s feet. The woman took her *pourboire* from Meran with a curt “*Merci, monsieur!*” and disappeared as noiselessly as she had come. One portable gas-jet flared dismally from the centre of the stage. The



gloomy emptiness of the house, the draped chairs and the draped balconies, gave Charlotte a sense of phantasmal and subterranean life.

“I feel like a ghost!” she whispered to Meran, close at her side.

“But imagine it all this time tomorrow night!” he whispered back to her.

Out of the blackness the glare of the footlights suddenly shot up. Shadowy musicians, with instruments under their arms, seemed drifting out from some still more shadowy underworld. They took their places at the music-desks, where, at a touch of the hand, a shaft of light flashed down on the white score-sheets. An occasional muffled laugh and the sound of a whisper or two echoed up through the emptiness.

Down in the orchestra a few straggling musicians had begun to tune their instruments. At one time Charlotte counted four different players running brokenly over certain passages of the score. The result was medley, raucous cacophony. It was like life and love unharmonized, she thought to herself. Then there was a little silence, and clear and low the flute-player went over a passage that rang out sweetly solemn through the dark house.

“That’s the love-phrase of Leander,” explained Meran. “But of course you know it!”

Charlotte gasped; no, she did not know it, and as her attention went back to the limpid, beautiful notes she heard Meran saying that it was a scrap Dorat had just added.

Charlotte looked at the stage again, for the first of the singers were coming in leisurely, in furs and coats and walking-costumes. They stood about in groups, under a dome of dreariness. Toward the back of the stage a pile of upturned canvas trees made a seat for some of the men. Others stood about the solitary table, near the one flaring gas-jet. Charlotte wondered if, amid such dreary surroundings, they could put their hearts into their songs. There was no illusion, no spur to inspiration and effort. It did not seem like art to her; it seemed the most sordid of matter-of-fact labor.

Then came a sudden lull in the stage commotion. It was Dorat who had entered.

“See, there’s Dorat, to the right,” said Meran.

But she had already caught sight of him, and had seen how pale and tired-looking he was. She noticed, too, that his throat was muffled in a black silk scarf.

It thrilled her, momentarily, to behold how the entrance of her husband altered the entire complexion of the little groups. They smiled and saluted and clustered about him; they waited and grew silent. He was a master entering his hall, a king entering his kingdom.

He acknowledged the salutations curtly; then he carefully put down his hat, inverted, on the table beside the one flaring gas-jet, next to the prompter's desk.

There was a half-whispered conference with the stage-manager, a cry for more lights, and a peremptory word passed round to the waiting artists.

Then the idle groups took on movement and meaning; they formed themselves into compacter form. The musicians seated themselves in their chairs. There was a sudden rustling of paper as they turned over the pages of their music and the conductor nimbly mounted to his seat and caught up his baton. Persons from still another unknown underworld crowded to the wings and peeped out. The performance was about to begin, from the first.

It was on Dorat, Charlotte noticed, that every eye seemed bent. He, it appeared, was the one vital and controlling heart of all that involved machinery of song. It was at a curt nod from him that the baton moved and the music struck up.

Charlotte sat listening, with her chin in her hand. At first, waves of white light seemed passing between her and the stage, and a sense of the unreality of it all overwhelmed her. Then, little by little, the music asserted its claim and caught her ear and held it. It was only scattered fragments of it, she told herself miserably, that were familiar to her.

"Ah, that was a phrase!" cried Meran, as the baton went down, and the conductor's eye turned to Dorat, and singers and players alike tacitly waited for his approving nod.

Then out of the silence that followed a series of rich harmonics, a voice, ravishingly sweet, beautiful in tone, a woman's voice, freighted with feeling and passion, began to sing the first melody.

It was the voice of Beauharnais. Her eyes were fastened on Dorat as she sang, as though it were into his heart alone she was pouring the torrent of her lyric emotion.

The composer listened with bent head, one hand behind his ear. He raised this hand suddenly and beat a slightly slower tempo. Both Beauharnais and the orchestra responded at once to the half-imperious and wholly imperative motion.

As the song swept up to its climacteric end Charlotte instinctively waited for the applause which she felt was to follow.

There was not a sound; the conductor waited interrogatively, the musicians looked from one to another and said nothing.

Then Dorat's voice broke the silence that reigned over the quiet stage.

"That is better, mademoiselle, much better! But for the love of God, put a little more feeling into that fourth line!"

He motioned for her brusquely; his voice was crisp and passionless. Charlotte gasped, in sympathy for the woman. Then it was not all the beauty and glory and triumph which it seemed, this art of theirs!

Beauharnais, with a nervous little step, came tearfully to the table where the open score lay. Dorat was beating time with his forefinger and humming the part to her, under his breath, and he stamped his foot on the stage, to mark the stress. She nodded contritely, resumed her place, the musicians once more struck up the prelude, and again she sang the song.

At the end Dorat clapped his hands abstractedly, penciled a hurried note or two on his score, and made a sign for the movement to go on.

"That is what we must have!" he said, in an afterthought, turning to Beauharnais.

There was one picture that haunted Charlotte's mind as she watched the figure with the muffled throat imperiously dictating and arresting and restarting the movement of that complex machinery. It was the vision of a frail and sandy-haired young boy on the back of a rawboned canal horse, doggedly yet dreamily driving the beast along its sullen way under a cold Canadian sky.

The transition from the one world to the other had meant much. It had meant privation and struggle and sacrifice, it had meant courage and strength and loneliness. Her own life—so guarded and shrouded and upholstered, so soft and purposeless and unsatisfied—how different it had been from his!

"I understand him at last," her heart was whispering to her, as she sat through the long hours there, listening. "I can know and feel for him now, for his aims, his music, his final end beyond all the accidents of life, for that something we women so seldom have come into our own lives!"

It was not the enemy of love, she told herself; it was that something which alone in life, without love, made the world hard and cruel and mean.

She, as his wife, was his solace, his comforter. These beings who were now clustered about him, who had seemed so close and intimate to him, were only his tools. They were his performers, to be praised or upbraided as they did well or ill.

*She* was this great man's wife; *she* was his comrade and counselor; it was to be her duty and honor and pride, during all the rest of her life, to make scrupulous amends for that wasted Winter of her discontent, to atone rigorously for a life and aim misunderstood. But would she be able to win him back? she demanded of herself, with a sharp little intake of her breath.

Meran, who had been studying her intent face in the dim light, ventured one sentence into her ear.

"You must look after him!" he said, with a nod toward the stage.

"I?" she said, with a quavering little mirthless laugh, "what can *I* do?"

"He will need a woman's care after this!" said the man at her side.

She looked down at the white-faced figure muffled about the throat with the silk scarf. He was mopping his brow prosaically, after prosaic battle.

"And tomorrow the world will discover him," added the grizzled old artist, as he buttoned his coat, for the shadowy musicians were once more disappearing into their shadowy underworld.

Charlotte did not answer. But she and her world, she told herself, had discovered him that night.

## XV

Like most of this world's triumphs, Dorat's victory with "Hero and Leander" came at a time when he was least ready to welcome it. As is often the case, the thorn outweighed the crown.

At the close of his opera's *première* it could be seen that Dorat was ill, a worn and shattered man. During the rehearsal of the next day he collapsed utterly, and was hurried home in a cab with his physician, childishly protesting that music and opera and everything would go to ruin if it was true that wooden-headed Leoncavallo was to be put in charge of things.

But his protests died away with his strength. For a week, while all Paris was ringing with his name, Charlotte hovered about his bed with a softness of voice and hand that seemed miraculously new to her.

It was, however, neither novelty nor miracle. It was only that one of the disrupting shocks of life had exposed to Dorat's eyes a wider and richer vein of her nature. He watched her meekly, obeyed her dutifully, and found an undreamed-of contentment in the shadow of her guardian shoulder. Even when his doctor ordered him off to the Riviera for a month he suggested that it be Sicily instead, and made ready to go with only a plaintive last cry or two about the fate of his opera.

"It's my first-born," he told her wistfully. "That's why I worry so much, I suppose!"

As their steamer drew nearer Palermo, and the great limestone mass of Monte Pellegrino could be seen towering above the beautiful city of palm and marble and peace, the thought came home to Charlotte that, turn slowly as they will, the wheels of the gods still ground exceeding fine.

Here was the city she had prayed for; here was the gift she had demanded, had blindly exacted of Fate. And the gods, in their sadly ironic way, had yielded all she had asked for. But they had yielded in their own way and on their own conditions.

Yet after her first week her anxiety passed away. Dorat's strength, in that mild and equable air, soon came back to him. His throat grew stronger; before many days he could speak to her in something more than a whisper.

"Oh, dear and dearest, what a child I make of you!" she said one morning, for even in his convalescence he insisted on having her near him. "Here I am, coaxing and petting, the whole day long!"

She could not help remembering her first distinct impression of him—"something of a boy, a little bit of a baby and a very great deal of a genius!"

"But I never had this sort of thing before," he confessed, with a half-rueful laugh, as he looked from the blue of the Mediterranean to what seemed the more celestial blue of her quiet eyes. They could hear the tinkle of the milk-herd bells, as the pattering little Sicilian goats were hurried through the narrow streets by the mellow-throated drivers.

"Do you know what I was thinking of, that first night of 'Hero and Leander'?" Dorat went on. "Can you imagine where my thoughts were when they began carrying up those ridiculous roses and big rings of laurel? I was thinking of a thin and scrawny young boy, on the back of a scrawnier canal horse, digging his heels into its ribs, so, and wondering if life would

ever hold such a glory, such a day of infinite bliss, as for him sometime to play first fiddle at one of Isadore Larocque's village dances!"

"That was at Lachine, wasn't it?" Charlotte asked.

"Yes, at Lachine! And oh, what an irony there is in things! What an irony there is in the very name! Lachine! Champlain and his men thought it was the road to China—and there it stands, La Chine, still mocking their poor hopes and their memory with its name!"

"It's always that way with life," answered Charlotte.

"Yes, my own, I believe it is. Irony is at the root of everything. It's life giving us the laugh. Why, that very love-song of Hero's, you say all Paris is singing now—can you imagine how that came to me?"

"How?" she asked. A sponge-seller, from the streets below, was calling musically through the morning quietness.

"It came to me those days I was alone, when—when you seemed so—so almost cruel! I was unhappy and lonely and wanted you, and I put it into music. So even your cruelty, you see, can be made into a sort of crown!"

She caught at his hand so contritely, with such dumb eloquence of unhappiness, that he took both her hands in his and kissed them laughingly.

Then they fell to talking about the future, how he hoped to spend half of the year in America—how both Jaroslav and Leoncavallo were trying to make him as America-mad as themselves—how they would send for Meran, as soon as he was himself again, and they should all have a holiday together in the Adriatic—and how they would all go back to Paris and to work again.

Charlotte, coercing herself to follow him in his mood of hopefulness, told him of her plan for remodeling the entire *bel étage* of their avenue du Bois de Boulogne place, so that he might have a comfortable workroom and library in one. She tried to make a joke of how she would stand on guard before its doors, to keep the world back from him and his work. But through her levity he could detect an undertone of passing solemnity.

"Oh, you American women!" he lamented, with mock gravity. "You are down, and up to breathe again, like a whale! You are always surprising us. We see you blow, and then you are off again!"

"If I *am* a whale," she laughed, as she slipped into his arms, "then it's only here that I ever come up to breathe!"

The sea, that evening, was cerulean in its placid quietness. A great golden moon shone languidly down into the Conca d'Oro, and there was a smell in the air that seemed strangely Aprilian and Springlike to Charlotte. The mild Sicilian night, after the rigorous climate of Paris in Winter, lay about them so balmy and soft and odorous that a feeling of languor, of muffled pensiveness, took possession of her. She wondered if it was mood or memory, and in the end she decided it was a mingling of both.

The thought came to her, as it had so often of late, that she was no longer a girl. Yet, even as that sense of something mysterious and mistral weighed on her, she seemed so full of the joy of living, so eager for the enigmatic future and all it held, that she could have fallen to weeping foolishly.

She turned to whisper something to Dorat, but for the second time she hesitated. Instead she drew him to the open casement, through which the great golden moon shone, and together they sat on the wide window-seat, looking out over the glimmering Mediterranean.

From the music-room of some neighboring villa or hotel sounded the notes of a piano. Someone was playing the Barcarolle of Chopin. They listened, hand in hand, haunted by a hundred memories.

When the last notes had died away he looked down in her face and smiled. The dusky room still seemed filled and haunted with the harmonics of the dead master's fancy. The very night seemed steeped in passion.

"Dear and dearest, how I love you!" she said, so quietly that it was almost a whisper.

"Weather-vane!" he called her contentedly.

"I have always loved you, Jean," she protested simply, "and I always shall—not so madly, I know, nor so foolishly nor so jealously, but it will be infinitely more!"

The eloquence of silence, in that heart-to-heart intimacy, filled the room for a moment or two.

"You know, my own, how unstable and wayward and wilful I was," she went on, in her course of determined self-humiliation. "I thought it was someone other than ourselves who made life full or empty for us. But now I think I know better. I thought you had cheated me; I thought that love itself was cheating me!"

"I was selfish, I know," he confessed. "But after this it will not come so hard!"

“Work is work, though—it’s what makes life!” she persisted. “Oh, Jean, try and learn to forgive me! I was always pampered and spoiled and undisciplined! I was always—”

“No; *I* am the spoiled one!”

“How can one spoil the queen-bee of the hive? You are the worker, the builder, the one to be fed and watched and cared for——”

He tried to muffle her mouth with his hand lazily. In line and color and spirit it was the loveliest mouth in all the world. But she held the hand between her fingers, bent on unburdening her troubled mind.

“You know,” she said, after a little silence, “what I’ve been thinking all day keeps bringing back to my mind something Uncle Cornelius once told me about his railways. He said that the lines of rails, no matter how firmly they were nailed and clamped and bolted down to the ties, kept creeping a little, ever so little, month by month—kept creeping and moving along the line of traffic. Well, Jean dear, I’ve begun to feel that I’m like that! I thought I could anchor myself to my own will! I thought I could hold out against all the forces and influences that sweep through life! But it was only blindness, childishness! I suppose it’s because I always looked out on life through plate-glass, because I never saw any deeper into things than our other over-wise and over-rich and over-indulged American girls do! That’s why I’m learning so late and so hard!”

“*I* should have been afraid to say that about your country!” whispered Dorat. She seemed unable to mount to his uplands of indolent happiness that night.

“But now,” she went on valiantly, though not without an effort, as the smile about her melancholy red lips deepened and grew more proudly humble, “now I’m not so afraid of life. Something—something has changed it all, Jean, and given it meaning and fulness and purpose!”

She looked at him, vivid and pulsing and timid. But he neither saw nor understood. Instead, he bent and kissed her hand.

“Oh, don’t be so Parisian!” she cried, with a flash of her old spirit. It was only a momentary flash, for when once he had taken her at her word and kissed her on the mouth her old-time timorousness returned to her.

Finally she drew his head down.

“I want to go back to my own people!” she said.

“We shall go, in a year, anyway!” he answered contentedly.



“Oh, before *that!*” she cried. “I couldn’t stand being among strangers!”

He looked at her in perplexity. His arm was still close about her.

“*You* will have to be the artist now, Jean—the beauty-gatherer, the dream-seeker—and I the plain home-body!”

Her restless fingers caught at the lapel of his lounging-coat and drew his ear down to her lips. What she whispered left him, he felt, only a groping and frustrated artist face to face with the complete and mysterious artistry of life.

“Am I no use in the world now?” she cried aloud, weakly, triumphantly, as the tears welled up to her eyes.

“This *is* the world!” he answered humbly, reverently. “This *makes* the world!”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Creeping Rails* by Arthur Stringer]