THIS THING CALLED LOVE

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a https://www.fadedpage.com administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at https://www.fadedpage.com.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: This Thing Called Love
Date of first publication: 1929
Author: Louis Arthur Cunningham (1900-1954)
Date first posted: November 8, 2026
Date last updated: November 8, 2026
Faded Page eBook #20261115

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

BY LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

YVON TREMBLAY, An Acadian Idyll (1927)

IN PREPARATION

THE COBBLER OF SAINT-ELOI
THE YEARS BEFORE THIRTY
FULVIA

THIS THING CALLED LOVE

By

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM



LOUIS CARRIER & CO

At the Mercury

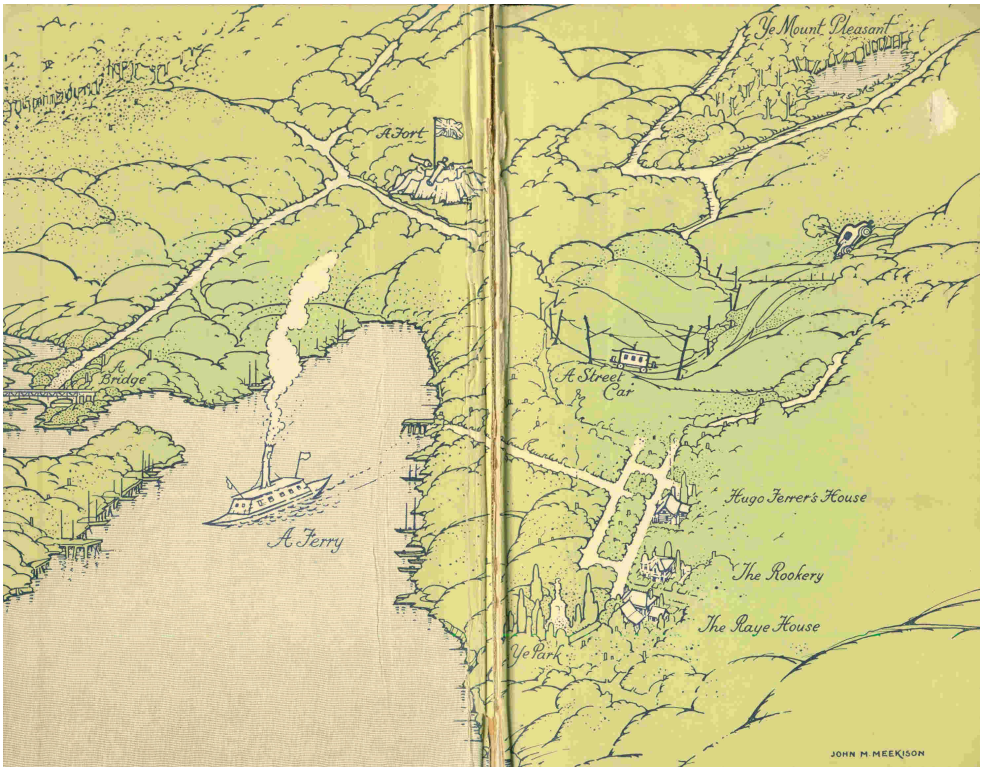
NEW YORK - MONTREAL - LONDON

Copyright, 1923
Copyright, Canada, 1929
By Louis Carrier & Co.

First Edition

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.
AT BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

To
WILLIAM COMERFORD BOWDEN


Ye Mount Pleasant
A Fort
A Bridge
A Street Car
A Ferry
Hugo Ferrer's House
The Rookery
The Raye House
Ye Park
JOHN M. MEEKISON

This Thing Called Love

CHAPTER I

It was just when Pat came back, discomfited, from falling through the fishman's basement window that she learned someone was moving into the Rookery. That was excitement! She forgot that the fishman—it was his house—not his store-window she had fallen through; and right into the blue and white tiled bathroom—had said, "You'll pay for this, you red-headed little vixen! I'm going to call your mother right away."

She had come down Wadham Street in a mood half-way between tears and mirth. It had been funny, the way those three panes of glass broke; and the window sash couldn't have been very good; and she had sat right on a cake of scented pink soap. There was a pink mark on the brown behind of her coat right now, and a sweet, soapy smell about her. Oh, yes, mother would have a lot to say and mother had found the strap at last. But who would think she'd go hunting for it on top of the Grandfather's Clock!

Pat walked slowly down Wadham Street. The fishman would have got mother on the telephone by now and said, "Mrs. Raye, that little girl of yours fell through my window, the bathroom-window, and smashed three panes and sat on a cake of pink soap." O-o-oh, mother would be furious and would look at her very mad-like and say coldly, "Come into the bed-room, Pat!" Then over the knee; up would go coat and skirt, and really she should have put thick woolen bloomers on today: it wouldn't sting so much. But how could she have known?

There was a sloven in front of the Rookery, across the street from the mansion of the Rayes'. A dirty-faced man in brown overalls and a blue sweater was lugging chairs and tables, a bureau, a washstand, an iron bed and a mattress onto the sidewalk. There was a big wash-basin and a pitcher; white, covered with large blue flowers. Pat could see that the pitcher was

cracked, and wondered if they had glued it, like she had done secretly to the handle of one of mother's best china cups. Funny about that cup. It was only one of a dozen; yet it had been selected, right after she had glued it, to take Mr. Reilly's tea. Mr. Reilly was Nora's new fiancé. Of course the glue hadn't properly dried and the tea fell in Mr. Reilly's lap and she had been sent from the table for laughing when mother said, "Those handles are very fragile. I hope it won't stain your trousers."

Well, no sense to go in the house right now. She'd be called soon enough. She wanted to go across the street and inspect the furniture at close quarters, but if she did, mother would surely see her from the upstairs window and request her to come indoors. So she stood in the great doorway and watched the moving-man's efforts to smash the furniture.

Patricia Raye, at twelve, gave promise of being a great female philosopher. She was clever. She had to be, for never a day passed without a dip into hot water and diplomatic exertions to avoid the strap. Into her strong supple little body and lanky limbs there flowed from the ages past the blood of the strong Celtic race. Her hair, cut closer than a boy's, was dark, dark gold; her eyes very wide, blue and guileless; her skin milky; her lips fitted neatly by Sir John Suckling's description. Yet, no—it was as if "some bee had stung *them* newly." They had a tiny pout that was more pronounced when the little devil woke up inside her. That was her explanation of her fits of temper—all blamed on a defenceless devil.

"O Pat! Mama's looking for you—" There was triumph in Diarmid's voice. This was the kid-brother of the Raye family, a year older than Pat. A short, sturdy lad with the same red hair and blue eyes, and all the fight in the world in his square, solid body and firm chin. He had come up the alley from the yard. Now he studied Pat with a cruel, malicious grin, as if appraising the damage a licking would do to her.

"I don't care." Defiantly. "Who's moving in over there?"

"There's a kid anyway. I can beat him. There's a girl and a woman, too. You'd better go in now."

"No, I won't!"

"How'd you come to break the fishman's window?"

"Oh; don't know." Pat was following the moving-man's Titan wrestling with a stove. "We were playing sitting down or something and I thought I was against the wall."

"Mona's got all her teeth out an' she's getting false ones."

"She isn't!"

"Wait and see. She took gas this afternoon up at Doc Brenner's. She's in the infirmary now and won't come home till morning. She'll have the teeth in a few weeks."

They looked at each other, enthralled. Mona was next in age to Diarmid. The possession of false teeth elevated Mona, for a while at least, to a place of high importance.

"Gee!" said Pat. "I guess I will go in. Maybe they'll forget about me now that Mona is getting false teeth."

She went gingerly into the vestibule, opened the door and marched upstairs. A sigh of relief escaped her: mother was not at the stair-head. On the second step from the top she got down on hands and knees and peered around the big post of the banister. They were in the parlour, mother and Denise and Nora, all looking out the window, camouflaged by the creamy curtains and the blue gold over-curtains. Mother and Nora stood on either side, Denise in the middle.

She was a cool one, Denise; a larger edition of Pat, but with a mind old as the oldest mind of woman. She was twenty, slim and straight, flat of breast and hip, crowned with flame. She had eyes of a deep iris shade, sleepy-lidded, with long pale-gold lashes; a full, wicked little mouth that could be very hard out of its usual demureness; strong white teeth that seemed to have a smile all their own.

"She looks like a light o' love." This was Denise, of course; always saying some incomprehensible thing. Who was a light o' love, and what did that mean? Pat, twisted like a little snake around the post, frowned.

"Oh, don't say such things!" This was mother. Nora merely looked around. She never did have much to say that meant anything and her mind lagged several laps behind that of the younger Denise. She may not have been exactly clear on the meaning of light o' love.

The three were fully occupied with the newcomers to the Rookery. Pat regretted that she hadn't stayed on the doorstep a bit longer to see them. Evidently the fishman's window was forgotten.

"Beef to the heels," drawled Denise. "Yet with fair possibilities, I should say. I was tempted a dozen times to put a match to the Rookery and I feel it 'in the deep heart's core,' *selon* Yeats, that I'm going to regret that sin of omission. Voluptuous, Oriental-like women in revealing dresses have no business in a hole like that. I mean no honest business. Methinks this quiet

backwater of the ancient Loyalist city of Saint John the Simple will be a rendezvous for all the local Lotharios, Don Juans, Ben Cellinis or what have you."

"Nonsense, Denise," said Nora coldly. "Your habits of free-speech make me quite ill sometimes. I'm sure these people are harmless enough. They should know better than to move into a wreck of a place like that—no electric lights, no bath, no heat. I don't see how human beings can live in such a hovel."

"Oh, they'll live all right," Denise yawned and turned away from the window. "Thank goodness there's something to interest you people anyway. There'll be a week of speculation before you arrive at the conclusions I've reached already. Then there'll be so much to talk about. As a matter of fact I've heard of that girl before. She's one of a class of women mentioned often in the Bible—if you've ever read it. I haven't. But Graham pointed her out to me one night. She was drunk in a taxi cab. Why will drunken women always go tooling about in taxis! They look so ridiculous. And she was with Harper Blythe, the town's wildest cry in the night."

"Graham knows everything," sneered Nora. "It must be handy to have a man like that. But he knows so much I should think he would prove an impossible husband, even for such a clever woman as you."

"Oh, I know you don't like Graham Starr. Most people don't; he goes out of his way to antagonize them. But he's fearfully patient with you, Nora, though you're very trying. He's used to clever people and sets a mighty high standard. As a matter of fact, only God could live up to Graham's standard. As for his knowing everything; that's his business. A novelist has to know everything. Well, I must finish that very dull book he gave me, so as to be able to argue with him when he comes tonight. When you two are weary of admiring Esther Pym's venal beauty, I could be persuaded to drink tea and eat some of that horribly tough sponge-cake Nora made. Also, please notice, I don't love Graham and certainly would not marry him even if he wanted me."

"Since you know so much," said Mrs. Raye, "who is the little boy—Esther's brother?"

"Oh, no; Esther's offspring. I told you these Pyms weren't quite regular. It's a sort of 'without benefit of clergy' business. The boy is handicapped by the lack of an official father. Poor little beggar!"

Denise walked out of the room and smiled down at Pat, standing with the tips of her brogues close to Pat's fingers outspread on the hall floor.

"Efface yourself, Pat. Beat it. Vamose. It isn't going to be healthy for you around here very shortly. If you really want to break windows, throw brickbats at them or push some other of your little playmates through them. You leave altogether too much evidence."

"Say, Denise, what's all that you were telling about those people who moved in across the street, in the Rookery? I don't know what you mean by half the things you say. You're worse than Wafer."

"Please do not allude to my friend, Graham Starr, as 'Wafer.' I loathe wafers. If you must have a pet name call him 'Eclair' or 'Marrons glacés' or 'Lakoum'—something I'm fond of, understand. And bless you, dear; here comes mother."

"Where were you?" Mrs. Raye had preceded Nora from the parlour. Her eyes, a paler blue than any of her children's, looked, as Pat had known they would, unkindly, accusingly, determinedly into those of her last-born. "Come into the bed-room, Pat!"

"A provincial town's the rottenest work of God." Denise smiled up into Graham Starr's face. Dinner was over. It was now close to eight o'clock. Until ten-thirty Graham Starr would sit there in the little nook between Denise's chin and her silken rounded knees, where she was curled up on the big tapestry-covered Chesterfield in the hall. They would read and talk and wrangle furiously. They would not kiss, for the saccharine mechanics of love between the sexes—a phrase of Denise'—didn't play any part in their association. They had too much to occupy them: Graham's latest book; Graham's next book, a dream holiday at the Château Frontenac. They loved snow.

"I agree with your definition of a provincial town, Denise. But don't plagiarize Pope, of all men."

Graham Starr was twenty-seven, a dark, almost saturnine young man with radical ideas about life. Someone had found fault with "Phryne," his latest novel. "But the idea of saying it was 'just a sexy book of the day'! My God! It's the first novel some of these people have read. And the looks they give me! One old wretch said I must be a very immoral person simply because Phryne got into a mess and—"

"Oh-oh! The Pyms have moved into the Rookery, Gray. Did you know?"

"Not really!"

They looked at each other and smiled widely.

"Into the purlieus of Wadham Street, where only the light of God shone before. Doesn't it strike you as a bizarre situation?—here on one side of the street is this great solid brick dwelling, its very front breathing respectability, affluence, high honour. Across the way—

'We catch the tread of dancing feet
We loiter down the moonlit street
And stop beneath the harlot's house.'"

As the light of a glaring moon on a dark river is adumbrated by a passing cloud, Graham Starr's face was shadowed.

"Such a place to come! Of course, you people will have them run off the street. It's an impossible situation. You can petition the City Fathers. It's bad for the children to see such—"

Denise gave him a quizzical look and pressed her head back into the cushions. Her hair had been newly washed. It shone and was fluffy; parted at the side, it was a great cloud of gossamer gold.

"Do you think it will endanger the children's morals to be so near Esther Pym? For a person so broad and tolerant, Gray, you seem to slip into the rut of ordinary prejudice quite readily."

"I hate to think of women like her being near you—yours."

"Do you fear that I would be contaminated?"

"I think you are the best of women, Denise." Graham's eyes were big, dark brown. He could look so steadily at one, too, till it seemed his eyes took you all in, body and soul. "He is getting a few grey hairs," mused Denise, regarding him mockingly from under the slumberous lids, "and little wrinkles about his eyes."

"Would you ever think of marrying me, Denise?"

She laughed, huskily; a dulcet, warm-toned laugh and studied her nails while she hummed from Carmen—

'L'amour est enfant de Bohème,
Qui n' a jamais, jamais connu de loi.'

"I might think of it—and think better of it. I wouldn't marry you. Would you marry me?"

"No. We're pretty good friends now and we seem to have come as near as is humanly possible to the reality of Platonic friendship."

"You're lying," said Denise coolly. "Else you're deceiving yourself. You know you want me—corporally. You'd like to kiss me, crush me in your arms. You're thinking of love in connection with me right now."

"Perhaps I am. You're not serious when you say you don't believe there is such a thing as love."

"I distinguish. Love—the idea we have of it—is only an illusion. You want me and to get me you'd say you love me and always will. That's absurd. What you want, any woman could give you. That's all your love is—sex-urge, or you see in Denise Raye some after-image. Don't talk love to me, Gray. I've been around."

"Yes; you've been around. And I'll wager a man's lips have never touched—"

"My lips?—Oh, yes, but no deeper. I've been kissed—ravished kisses or play kisses, you understand—but none of them ever took. Who of the immortals—was it Elinor Glyn?—said there were white kisses and red kisses? Mine have all been white."

"That's what I meant. You've never felt madness; never wanted to let yourself go, just not giving a damn."

"Why, no! That is my only strength. Don't you see?—the permanence of my power to resist that madness, that will to make a fool of myself. That's my one buffer against life—innocence. Yet I am no saint, even though I have not fallen. I know as much about—things—as you do. And because of that knowledge, which I don't attempt to hide, people sometimes lift a cynical eyebrow when Denise Raye is mentioned. 'She knows too much.' That's partly because I've been around with you a lot, Gray; but even if I'd never met you and listened to you I'd be the same."

"You don't think you'll go through life like that—as an observer? Why should a woman pride herself on never having fallen? Cant! Cant! Cant! Increase and multiply—isn't that in the Bible? Yet virginity still has a halo about it and celibacy is not proscribed and there are reams of old maids. With you, Denise, it's simply that you haven't met the man—that it?"

"Perhaps. Yet I was quite enraptured with a trainman I used to see when I was going to and fro from the convent at Sillery, and from Havergal. I used to dream about him. Of course, I was very young. But let's not talk of love. You started it. I don't love you—even in the narrow significance of the word. I have no desire to let you pet me, play with me or wanton with me."

"You could love, Denise. There's fire in you."

"Tremendously. And I burn, burn, sometimes. It's hell. But what would you? I don't want to marry. I loathe children, as many women do; though the silly things pretend to love them. I won't tie myself to one man irrevocably and I detest Esther Pyms. Bah, promiscuous shes!"

"You are revolutionary. Don't you find it hideous living in a parochial place like this, where a thousand sharp noses pry into your affairs, where you can't get a new hat without some fools making it a topic of discussion?"

"It's funny—this parochialism. It tries to stifle individuality, tries fiendishly. You know everybody, they know you and they can turn a whole tide of approval or disapproval your way. I used to hate them, for a while. It's not pleasant to know that people pass you and turn around to stare, and whisper about you and hate you with the strongest hatred if they fancy you're one bit better than they are. They always want to pull you to their level or push you beneath it. But don't you find the strongest individualism here, too—stronger because of what it fights against? You, for instance, are a Philistine dwelling in the camp of the Israelites."

"I know it and sometimes I wish for God's power that I might turn and rend all mine enemies. I want only to be left alone, to have the right to go about my business free of prying and interference. Do I get it?—I don't. Vicious tongued old women and young ones old before their time make me and my affairs a subject for telephone-conversations. They speculate on my doings. They criticize and condemn. Damn them into hell!"

"Gently, Gray. Why do you react so readily to them? Cultivate an illusion of grandeur. I know you're just staying here—"

"To be near you. Also, I want to write a book about this mess. I want to pin down the bott-flies and preserve them for posterity. I want the world to laugh at them and hail me as the showman, as the one who made it laugh. And I will, Denise."

"I believe you. But don't be bitter. Ridicule is a far keener weapon than bitterness. You can't fight against ridicule, if it's honest. Bitterness begets bitterness. God forbid that you or any sane person should crawl around in the squirrel's mill of this long-necked town. But don't neglect its good and beautiful aspects. There are people and people. You'll find decent ones here, friendly, tolerant, even broad folk, who can understand."

"Oh, yes, I've found you. But there are very few others. And it sickens me. I never dreamed that hatred and envy could play so big a part in people's lives. It's so here. Simply because I ignore them, they sneer and gibe and talk; talk with the hope that it will reach me. It does. And I'm not

endowed with a skin like a crocodile. It hurts and I resent it and swear to pay. Someday I will pay, I will punish—

'Un tems viendra qui n'est pas venu
Que je morderay qui m'aura mordu.'

But my position and the good Philibert's are reversed. I want to bite the bourgeois. I hate them—scum!"

"Ignore them. They are only half alive. You know what life here is—poverty, pessimism and prudery from the cradle to the Dead March. It's a hard fight for a mean existence. These girls who clerk in the stores—six or seven dollars a week to live on. And they do it, honestly. At least, they exist. And the men—if a fellow gets forty or fifty a week he is considered to have arrived. Life has treated him well."

"Oh, yes." Starr looked appalled. He stuffed a gleaming black briar-bowl with shag, lighted and puffed slowly. He looked down into Denise Raye's eyes with troubled directness. "But there are no great men here, no village Hampdens; no Miltons, mute, inglorious. They go not out of sight of the smoke which rises from their chimney fires. Their spirits are fungus-grown, in a constant state of rot. Year after year the drab banner of poverty flaps in the breeze and the local Tageblatt announces that prosperity—strange, elusive thing—is coming. It is—on the wings of imagination. How can it come? We have few industries, few factories, a pitiful few that struggle for a precarious and ignoble existence, that underpay their hands, that are treadmills. Thousands of our native-born have gone; not led by the lure of big money, but merely by the hope of making a fair and honest living. They go, they prosper, they become different when earning their bread ceases to be the whole end of life, when they have a chance to love others because they no longer need to envy them."

"You speak like a surgeon standing over a subject for vivisection, Gray. You are a rare hand with the scalpel, my friend, but you do not approach your lecture with a calm, unbiased mind. You bring rancour to it. Your words will be tinged with vitriol. Laugh, laugh. For it's funny, really funny, to view persons whose chief concern is not their own business so much as others'. For instance: Esther Pym has moved onto this street. Esther Pym is the town's imitation of the notorious woman, the courtesan, of the big cities. Even in such a pitiable imitation this community falls down. In a big city your courtesan wears a real seal coat. Alas, poor Esther has a 'cat' that is most nondescript. I saw her carry it in. And Esther has no house of splendour in which to practice her art. She has only a wretched hovel. It's a

mighty poor town that can't support even its notorious women in style. Yet tonight Esther is, I venture to say, the most talked of person in the block."

"Denise, have you ever seen Esther Pym?"

Starr spoke after a moment's silence. His eyes never swerved from hers. It was a marvel that they could look so long at each other impersonally, for Denise was young and slimly supple. Though strength of mind and character was written indelibly on her face, she was no virago; not that most detestable of persons, the tomboy or the masculine young female who apes man that she may come nearer to him for the purpose of being a woman. Denise was not cold.

"You pointed her out to me yourself," she answered hesitantly, puzzled. "She was drunk, riding in a taxi with one Blythe, of unsavoury repute, a local roué—also a very poor imitation of a very picturesque metropolitan type. What have we a good imitation of?"

"Some of our accidents resemble those of other places. Stay with me—you never really got a look at Esther?"

"Saw her on the street today."

"Not her face?"

"No."

"She has a lovely face, Denise—a composition, so to say, of the Sistine Madonna, Mona Lisa and Ninon de Lenclos."

"What a trio! You're not joking? You really think this—this girl is lovely!"

"I am afraid of her—just because of that."

Denise Raye was a woman. Being a woman she knew very little about men, though she was a very wise woman. Graham called this girl lovely. He said Esther Pym was lovely and when he said it there was some quality in his voice, some warmth, some caress that had never been there when he told Denise she was fair.

"You are afraid of this queer unit reincarnation of three formidable women, the lovely trinity? I cannot take you seriously."

"Perhaps it is as well. I should not take myself seriously in the matter. The worst of women can tempt the best of men. The old paradox of extremes. I am a good man in that I have steered clear of women. I have

done that, not because of any law, inhibition, fetish or ju-ju; merely because I've never really wanted a woman enough to—to hurt her."

"Loving and hurting, then, are synonymous with you?"

"One hurts what one loves. Yes; for me to love a woman would be for that woman to suffer. That, Denise, is one of the reasons I have kept from loving you. At least, I think I have."

"You have. Unwittingly you have proven my thesis put forth in the beginning of this deeply moral discourse—there is no such thing as love, there is only passion. You say you are afraid of Esther Pym. You find her face lovely. I believe you are normal; you feel for every lovely woman a certain *attirance*—urge, if you will. You feel it for me, you may feel it for Nora, for Mona, when she gets her teeth. You feel it stronger for Esther Pym because she is more likely to gratify it. Am I right?"

Her eyes sparkled with triumph. Specious though her argument was, it had a semblance of logic and for a woman even a semblance of logic is an achievement.

"I won't admit you're right," Starr denied stubbornly. "It's true that bad women have a huge appeal for men, so have bad men for women. That's easily explainable, easily paralleled by the enthusiasm with which small boys emulate notorious bandits, murderers and incendiaries, by the way newspapers romanticize and glorify crime. Paphnuce, the good monk of the Egyptian desert, fell into an ungodly love for the fair Thaïs, the loveliest and most wicked woman in Egypt. He lost his soul for her. Funny world."

"Paphnuce could live only in the pages of Anatole France. No man, not even a monk, could be such a monstrosity—as full of complexes as a sponge is of holes."

"Nevertheless, the deflection of this austere anchorite is an instance of my doctrine that a good man doesn't need a good woman to lead him astray. If you want another proof on the same general plan, there's Manon Lescaut."

"Oh, I didn't deny that. Your doctrine is not novel. The story of the Garden of Eden is built on it. Eve was a bad woman; Adam a good man. Eve won out and a multitude of Abbé Prevosts and Anatole Frances have been using the cliché ever since."

"You treat the matter lightly. It's quite serious with me. Why should a man be feeble, his whole fund of good sense, his culture and education worth nothing as a resistance-factor against some woman who has no single gift of God except shapely limbs and a pretty face?"

"Why? Don't ask me. Though you know the answer as well as I. The man isn't made who can hold out against the temptation of a woman, provided the temptation be strong and favourably conditioned. Your monks and anchorites were shielded; they are today. All culture and education falls before that ineradicable streak of the animal in us. After all it's pitiful, this thing called love, this play of the passions. It seems to have no real title to the important place it holds in the world; yet it has held its own throughout all time. It has made history, it is the mother of all wisdom."

"Deservedly, I think." Graham Starr was in his element, giving seriously every bit of himself, every sinew of his brain to this discussion. Denise, within, was laughing; men were such idiots. "It is the master passion, you see. Very often it is love of a woman that makes a man undertake great things."

"Yes, and then she marries him and her nagging keeps him at it till the great thing is accomplished. I am a bit cynical on the question of love. I don't think it is the glorious thing it's painted. No doubt it keeps the world moving and puts a lot of spice into existence. Without it there wouldn't be any children, yet it's doubtful if the pleasure love gives counterbalances the pain a woman suffers. You can look on it as a duty, though. I think that's a really sensible way to look on it, as the Scholastics did. Their doctrine, still slightly alive today, holds, first, that marriage, which is legalized love, is entered into for the procreation of children; secondly, for the mutual consolation and support of the contracting parties. That rather neglects the pleasure idea. Yet not one couple in a million ever married with those two ideas uppermost. No; they wanted each other and marriage is the accepted way."

"Bah! You've been reading Bernard Shaw again. You think that for a man to remain true to one woman, 'till death do them part,' requires more of pure loyalty than of what we call love."

"I surely do. Love, *proprement dit*, lasts about three months at most, after that the permanence of marriage depends on perhaps loyalty; more likely a hybrid force compounded of fear of one party for another, fear of what the town will say if they chuck up the job, desperation and the inbred idea that once married you're supposed to stay put, even though by so doing you're anticipating your future life and enjoying hell already."

"Were you never in love, Gray?"

"Once."

"Seriously?"

"Oh, very seriously. And therein lies another phenomenon of this love business: often the sublimest love is visited upon the most ignoble of objects. Love is a selfish and subjective thing. I speak, to be sure, of love of the sexes, of man for woman. What does a man love in a woman? He loves himself, I think. His woman is simply a great vehicle for his self-expression. The more he has to express, the greater will be his love. And most souls are starved. But fall in love with a woman and by bestowing a great gift on her you can feel magnanimous, by taking out your spite on her, if she's fool enough to let you do it, you can feel sad or satisfied, by drawing her into your arms you can feel a power like unto the gods' power. Yes, it's quite a selfish business."

"It is with a man. Can you speak for women?"

"I'm not so foolhardy. Yet I dare say it's the same thing. She can exercise her maternal instincts on the man she loves. The purely passionate aspect of love is not so vital to a woman as to a man. I think a lot of wives pity their husbands and wonder at them. There are exceptions. I've known marriages where the woman did most of the wooing before and the loving afterwards. It's a mess. If only we were as chaste and straightforward as the animals!"

"Animals have no souls." Derisively.

"Hence no sins."

"I'm curious, Gray, about that once you were in love. Will you tell me about it?"

"It wasn't at all sublime. One of those affairs that are common enough and even droll to the world at large; but to him who is the main actor, a source of torment and heartache and all the agony of passion. That's what it was, I see now; just passion. It may have been woman I wanted, not a woman. Sex-urge, the Freudians would call it."

"Disastrous?"

"Horribly so. A whole crystal world of dreams crushed into shards, splinters and powder. I've been wary since, but I was not so thoroughly inoculated as I thought. I am still subject to the disease."

"Even when you know what it is; how trivial it is?"

"Yes, even though I recognize it as a mere madness of the flesh."

"You feel it—?"

"Not for you, Denise. I know you would not want me to. I separate you from the physical part of love. You're too utterly cool, too sane, too intelligent. To love you—like that—would be—"

"But there is a woman, Gray?"

"I have told you."

"Not this—not Esther Pym!"

He nodded, almost sullenly, ashamed of himself; yet too honest to deny. Starr was flawlessly forthright in some things. People frowned when they got into debate with him; he had so few fetishes; if he became warmed sufficiently he might sacrifice delicacy to truth.

"But why this one? Why should you seek in her, of all women, what you could find in any other?"

"That I don't know. Men, good men too, have loved women whom the rest of the world scorned. They have seen beauty where others saw only a hideous infamy. I don't want to love Esther Pym. I fight myself; but I can't help thinking of her. Does it revolt you?"

"The traditional part of me." Denise smiled wistfully. "The common sense part of me tells me to consider the case dispassionately, free of all the ideas of rectitude, morality and convention. I loathe the word Modernism; it's a misnomer, yet I like to think I'm a Modern. It's a jolly hard thing to be. You know, you're fighting a tremendous array of forces when you try to think for yourself, forces that are no less powerful because unseen and unvocal. You feel that you're a bit reckless, a bit foolhardy not to accept what the great mass of people accept, not to agree with established and venerated dogma, not to conform with what your ancestors all conformed with. You are in revolt against a world and even though it may be wrong, its wrong strength will trample you down. Weak souls are overcome by its power, strong souls embittered, if not defeated. There's no freedom in the true sense. You can't do what you want to do, can't even think what you wish without incurring a storm of dissent, criticism and cant."

"You feel it, too. The educational agencies of the world don't want people to think; they want them to think the way their teachers do. It's not the same thing. A man has a right to try for his own conclusions and reach them if he can, provided he goes about it intelligently and argues sanely. He may reach wrong conclusions. He has the privilege of doing just that. It's his own business, but the business of authority is molestation and the putting

down of individual thought. We haven't progressed far from the Inquisition or the intolerance of Puritanism."

"But you don't really care for this woman?" Denise, being a woman, was obsessed with the idea that Starr had suggested to her. There was nothing in the world to prevent his loving where he wished. But a man's love-affairs are a woman's business-concerns. She was curious to know what Esther Pym meant to him. Esther Pym was not decent. She was a wanton, a girl from whom decent folk drew away their garments, a Magdalen in this day when Pharisees throw only verbal stones and no Christs walk upon the earth.

"Care for her? She troubles me, as I told you. She disturbs me, ruffles what little of the Stoic is in me. I hate people who pique me and cause me to give them a second thought. That's egotism, I suppose. But I do. I resent that they have power enough to penetrate my armor and possess part of me. I have a tremendous capacity for hatred."

Denise thought deeply, but she could not fathom Starr's ideas. Sometimes she thought they were horribly distorted, as if he had made monsters of them, the untrue, bizarre things a baby will make with the parts of a picture puzzle; no two sections fitted properly except by hazard. He had been all over the world. He had seen much and would not talk about it. She wondered if he had been a good man always. Wise enough she was to know that it's only an exceptional man who can be really good if he have not a real religion, his own or an adopted one. Starr seemed to have no solid principles to which to anchor, no principles of morality or faith. Yet he might be good, he might be even ascetic in his way of life, in his dealings with women. As long as she had known him he had been so with her, gentle, honest, clean. Yet now he talked casually of falling in love with a common woman.

"I don't understand you, Gray."

"We'd hate each other if you did," he answered, smiling. "I can't understand myself and I should resent anyone else who could. I'd feel like a puppet. That's the spice o' life—to think always, to speculate, to formulate ideas—and find they're wrong or nearly always mutable. There's contentment for you if you choose to adopt a good code of rules and abide by it, let come what will. But not for me. Life is given us not just to endure it, to pass through it as easily and as painlessly as possible, but to examine it, learn what we can about it, experiment with it."

"Why not use the results of other men's experiments. After all, they're the same old processes—"

"No! It's the individual experimenting that is worthwhile. That's the only maker of progress—individual experiment and men who dare to think for themselves. Necessarily they plough over a lot of old ground but they often do hit some new patches and turn up strange things."

"All right. Get you to Esther Pym. You and I would prove an impossible couple. We would spend our time in debate and fail miserably in matrimony. I suppose a man like you wants one woman to love, another to talk philosophy with. Do you hope to find the two combined in one, ever?"

She gazed at him challengingly, her eyes between the creamy half-closed lids like blue crescents.

"Perhaps."

But she felt then suddenly with a cold fear that he did not look on her to desire her, that she did not awaken in him what another woman, a bad woman, could awaken—

There was a scuffling on the stairs. It was dark now outside and yellow lamps blinked here and there on Wadham Street. Pat and Diarmid were coming in, laughing, pushing.

"Oh, don't! My back, Diarmid. Don't thump me there. It stings."

Two red heads above the stair-top.

"Denise," said Pat, "that new kid across the street said, 'Oh, my mother's just an old—old—' What was it, Diarmid?"

But Diarmid didn't answer, though he may have known. Denise and Graham Starr guessed. Her eyes were cold.

CHAPTER II

At a quarter to eleven Graham Starr walked across the Common, a square of lawn, trees and shrubs, with neat flower beds, intersected by wide asphalt walks in the pattern of a Union Jack. There was a sickle moon, its gibbous crescent poised among the stars on their blue tapestry. The Common cut Wadham Street in two and there were stairs, old wooden ones with iron railings painted green, leading up from the eastern side, whence he had come.

Graham liked the Common. Children in merry scores played there in summer at chase, Cowboys-and-Indians, on velocipedes, bicycles and red wheeled carts. Plump, contented mothers wheeled their young in prams or let them tumble on the shaven grass. In winter the children came with skis, sleds and toboggans and coasted down the precipitous sides of the Common, escaping motors by miracles. Always there were hordes of dogs, what Cobbet calls "stout and clamorous dogs," who ran in dervish rings, their tongues lolling, and barked and snapped. In summer the Grassman got many of them and shoved them in the pound. But more always came to replace the captives.

At night the Common was a place peopled by witching shadows. Benches under the tall birches, maples and Balm o' Gilead held couples of lovers up to and after midnight. Public displays of love, even in love's seasons, are not countenanced in this City of the Just, but on the benches swains hugged their sweethearts and kissed, mercifully sheltered by the shadows. And the Grassman, with whom Graham loved to talk, told stories that may have had truth in them.

Every night that Starr came from visiting Denise Raye he walked through the Common on his way to his own rooms on Mount Pleasant. For a fortnight past he had made many resolves to change his route, to go up Sydney Street and shun temptation, for Esther Pym sat by the high monument in the centre, sometimes alone, sometimes with a man. But always he knew that Esther Pym looked at him.

A harlot looked at him, and he was afraid. Usually when a man feels a woman's eyes upon him he is flattered, flustered, he acts in silly fashion if he is the ordinary bourgeois, and shows off. But Starr was far from ordinary. He did not blush or smile or even scowl, but he resented her looking at him and

felt strangely uncomfortable. It did not seem right that he should come from Denise and meet such as Esther Pym and be piqued by her glance and be troubled. He resented her because she could disturb him, even inspire him with the wish to come close to her. She had a wild, dark loveliness. "Sensual as hell," he said, "yet not gross, not repulsive."

It angered him that this girl with just a glance from big black eyes, a glance half seen in the hybrid light of stars and dim lamps could affect him more than the sane companionship of Denise Raye. It did not seem fair. Esther Pym did not attack his reason, she did not care about his reason. It was the woman of her that spoke to the man of him. With Denise it was mind speaking to mind, a sexless business, and though Denise attracted him, he could not think of her as he could think of Esther Pym. If there came to him unholy thoughts about Denise, her own white purity was enough to dispel them and forbid them; but not so with Esther Pym. She seemed all flesh, while Denise was all spirit. Her lines were bold, alluring, her lips seemed as if they had been kissed often and were faintly marred; her eyes held shadowy suggestions. Denise was matter-of-fact, the woman in her restrained; she was boyish. She looked on love with analytic eyes and found it just an ordinary passion glorified and glamoured by lying poets.

Esther was there tonight. He saw the ghostly sheen of flesh-coloured silk covering her limbs, crossed carelessly. He heard her laugh, a thrilling, bell-like laugh that sounded in ripples. A man was with her; his arm might have been around her. Starr did not know, for, though he looked, he passed quickly and was angry at himself and at her. He felt as if she had marked him and was consciously trying to impress herself upon him. She was molesting him and there was nothing he could do except avoid even the sight of her.

But now she had come to live in Wadham Street, in the Rookery across from the mansion of the Rayes'.

"Damn it," he muttered striding angrily across the Common, feeling her eyes upon his back. "Such a place to come to flaunt her rotten existence! I can understand Puritanical rage. I can even sympathize with those biblical fellows who chucked stones at the adulteress. She's a brazen piece, this woman, and why she should interest me is more than I can grasp. But there it is—I shall be haunted now by the image of her. That's the devilish thing about her: she gets me, overmasters me, finds my weakness. Denise attacks my mind with her mind; this girl—ugh!"

He shuddered as if shaking a hot, defiling hand from his shoulders. There was warmth in the August wind, fragrant warmth like a woman's breath. His body felt hot, uncomfortable, unclean. He thought of fighting his way through a clear, cold stream, purging himself, and longed to tear the low collar of his white shirt open and free his throat. Images thronged in his mind and would not be put down, images that, if let have their way, would destroy him and make him an abject thing, less than the man he prided himself on being. They were images of Esther Pym. He damned Esther Pym and swore to see her no more.

There was a hill to climb and the Valley to go down into before he walked up the slope of Mount Pleasant. There were lights among the trees from the low, gabled house where he had rooms. He loitered along the sidewalk close to a lilac hedge. Down in the Valley the moon kindly touched drab and sooty roofs and ugly chimney pots and made them bright and hallowed. A gentle planet, the moon; kindlier than the sun, which drives men mad and makes deserts and suchlike horrible things.

Graham Starr stopped by the gate in the lilac hedge to fill his pipe and smoke. He gazed reflectively up at the screened square of light above the porch.

"I wish I had your philosophy, Varick," he said very low. "I wish I didn't hate and lust and fear. I'm never at peace, God help me, never. Eyes are always looking at me. I feel that I'm a masque and that I have to fight always to keep up the masque, lest my enemies tear it down and find a pitiful, shaky me behind it. I'm alone now; I'm a bit happy. With Denise I'm happy. But there's a damnable pride which keeps me from telling even her or you, who could understand, how wretched I am and how unable to adjust myself to others, to life. It's always been like that. I've acted, played a part that is not me. I'm here, I'm there, and I don't know why. It's peace I want, but something inside me drives me on restlessly and I know I shall never stop. Monks have a happy time, their lives are at once the most selfish and the most unselfish. They give up the pleasures of the world; they escape all its ills. Living that way you miss just everything. I like to go through with the business and try to find an answer, something real and indestructible in this big lie called life. For there is something that's pure truth, that won't fail you. It may be the idea of God, it may be love, it may be hate, but I can't and won't say, '*agnosco*.' No; I'll find something, even if it's wrong, and live it and cling to it. O, Varick"—he raised his voice—"wouldst walk with me?"

A face and shoulders, big, blurred, loomed up against the screen.

"That I would, lad," called Varick.

Presently the door onto the dark porch opened and let out dim light, and Varick came, his heavy brogues clumping on the steps, then crunching the gravel strongly. His pipe bowl glowed. He came to Starr's side and they walked silently along, with never a word, up a pale, undulating road into the Park.

Varick's white shirt was open at the throat. Presently Starr's hand yanked impatiently at his blue bow-tie and undid it, pulled it off and thrust it into his pocket while his other hand unfastened the button and freed his throat. Varick looked at him curiously. Varick was tall and strong and manly. Perhaps you have seen how cleverly; no, that is not the word, how sublimely, in the picturization of Ben Hur, the personality of the Nazarene was suggested: just a few times His slim white godly hands appeared, and healed and soothed. So only did Ian Varick intrude upon the affairs of men.

Starr knew that his companion would gladly have kept up the silence. Varick was a painter, also a poet and a player of the violin. The night was a symphony to Varick. Those crouched up shrubs by the roadside, those twisted trees, that splash of golden-rod in the moonlight, strange shadows and presently the wide white bosom of a lake; the faint sweet scent of many flowering plants, the light buzz of wings—colour, sound, suggestion. Varick sighed. But to Graham Starr the night was hideous; Esther Pym walked by his side and he felt all flesh.

"Varick!"

"Yes."

"What do you know of love?"

"For a wise man there is only one answer—nothing."

"Were you ever tormented by the thought of a woman whom you didn't want to love; yet who—?"

"Not exactly. I've studied the malady a little. A woman you don't want to love, you say. Yet she can trouble you?"

"You know little of me, Varick, and I hate to bother you with my affairs. It's only a few months since you came to live here and your life is so serene, so utterly peaceful that perhaps you won't mind—"

"I won't mind. No sane man's life is as serene as you seem to think mine to be. Life is a war and when you're not fighting, you're preparing. There are fossils to be sure, but that Ian Varick should be one—God forbid!"

"Up unto a fortnight ago," said Starr, "there was only one woman in my life. I shall say no names. You would not know her, for you know so few. This woman is all spirit, all mind, to me at least; likewise, I think, to all men. Yet I could love her. I believe I do love her physically. But it was always the splendour of her intellect, the vigour of her thoughts, that appealed to me. She is noble and pure. Then another came into my life. How does a woman come into a man's life? A glance, a smile—I don't know. Anyway, the woman has entered into me and I am afraid of her. She is not a good woman."

"Her ways are the ways of the flesh; so you lead me to think. Surely your problem is not unique, friend. Yet is it a problem? Must you choose? Must you give yourself to either of them?"

"I feel I must, and one of them possesses the advantage, for I am—helpless. There's a craving in me—"

"I dare say. A man's biggest fight is with himself, with those tempests called the passions. Some say it's best to yield to them—that way lies madness. There's nothing worse than a man who has lost control of himself. He's just a straw blown in the wind and what little gratification he gets from indulgence is blotted out by bitterness—*amertume*; yes, that's a good word. Yet men who have firmly leashed their passions are often inhuman things, fanatics, zealots, puritans. It's a business of extremes if you look at it that way. But there's a middle pathway, I'm sure. A man can be just human, midway between a saint and a scoundrel, looking towards the saint, away from the scoundrel. Which woman would you go through hell for?"

Starr laughed. He envied Varick; saw in him a great philosopher, the only man he could never really penetrate. There were plombless depths in Varick. He had been about—the States, India, Heidelberg, Oxford. He had money in plenty, but his tastes were a student's.

"I've never thought of it that way. But you don't understand. One of these women is venal; the other does not love me. I doubt if she ever has loved any man—that way—or ever will."

"Absurd. Love is a woman's nature, man dear. You want me to think this one is a sort of monstrosity, a girl who talks about Nietzsche and quotes Blake and would be willing to forego a perfectly good offer of marriage just for the privilege of being Bernard Shaw's secretary. That, in a woman, is all play acting." Varick spoke rapidly, almost feverishly when he was aroused; now his words tumbled out exultantly and he laughed. "You have given me a picture of two women, one a saint; the other a courtesan. I smile. They're

both women, and being woman, their places are interchangeable. What I mean is this: Place the circumstances, your saint becomes your courtesan, your courtesan becomes your saint. God, you don't know how plastic life is nor yet how pitiful are its distinctions. There was no saint more splendid than the Magdalen; and saintly women have fallen from high estate of virtue, as Guinevere."

"Would you, then, love a bad woman?"

"Why, yes! If she loved me; perhaps even if she didn't love me, I could love her. That question of good and bad doesn't enter into the passion of love; which bears out in part the contention of those who say there are no such things; like Will Shakespeare—

> 'There is nothing good or bad, but thinking
> Makes it so.'

In love it's not the good or bad in a woman that one loves. It's the woman herself, too often just the mere flesh and blood of her. And that's not right if you look on love as leading to marriage. I could want a bad woman very much, but not for the mother of my children, not for a fireside companion. You see? So much beside passion enters into the choice of a mate. I am presuming, to be sure, that you are monogamous."

"I am. I doubt that man is by nature monogamous, but it is the best state, if we want the world to go on as it is."

"One woman's enough for any man," said Varick stoutly. "A man can find his universe in the girl he loves. He can see and learn all things in her eyes, her soft breast can be his head's calm resting-place, her arms can be his barriers against the spear points of the world's hate and despising, her lips can be his heaven, through her he can live. If there were no other argument for the existence of a God woman would still be a strong one. She is the rarest, sweetest thing in life."

"You speak of good women."

"I speak of woman. I hate that distinction of good and bad. In spite of all laws and dogmas it's an arbitrary business. Downright bad people are mighty few and if life had treated them differently they might have been all right. In truth, I can't imagine a bad woman, though they say that when a woman goes towards evil she goes in earnest. Woman has heart, lots of it; but no conscience. She is emotional, not logical."

"Is it safe to generalize?"

"About women, yes; far safer than to do so about men. There's a splendid sameness about women in the broad scheme of actions. Their outlook on life is peculiarly their own. They form ideals faster and cling to them longer than a man. I have known women to hold to the illusion of love, to be still in love when the man they have chosen turns out to be a drunken waster and a fool. The world considers him so, his fellows allude to him as such. But his woman—well, she loves still her ideal man and even if he can't stand up straight and his breath is inflammable and he curses at her, she'll put him to bed and kiss him goodnight. Women love like that, wise women, too."

"That's folly, a species of insanity. You seem to have admiration and sympathy for a woman of that type, Varick; I have neither."

"But it's very consoling to be loved like that when all the world has gone back on you and you've made a mess of things. It's pulled men up. It's had its reward, that constant love. It goes deeper than passion, which is a good enough thing in its way, though mighty likely to cause a chap to make a fool of himself. You, for instance, over this woman who exerts a charm upon you. It's obvious that her attraction for you is a physical one and when the game is played and done, it's done and you have nothing. But this other girl whom you call a saint—I'd think seriously of her. Remember, if you're living with a woman you have twenty-three hours of ordinary association to one of pretty playfulness, and if she doesn't know what you're talking about and you find her grammar bad—God help the both of you. So speaketh Varick."

"You're too deucedly practical," said Starr bitterly. They had stopped by a little weir that drained the water from the lake and sent it tumbling down in a white gold cascade over jet rocks. Varick tapped the dottle from his pipe by dint of hitting the bowl against his heel. They turned and retraced their steps. Varick had talked himself out and now hummed "Bonny Sweet Bessie" with selfish enjoyment.

"The Scots make real, hearty music; honest, sincere music," he said, and hummed anew. Starr made no more talk of love; for his companion, love was "over the hills and far away."

They walked back by the lake shore. The water gurgled and lapped and in the trees were faint sighing voices. A night-bird called, far, lone, eerie, and the jostle of Varick's strong arm comforted Starr and consoled him with a touch of good human companionship.

They came to the house with its neatly cropped lawn, its trimmed hedges and fine shade trees. Varick's door was on the left. Apparently he had forgotten his discourse on love, but Starr had not.

"You think," said Starr, "that a woman is slower to condemn than a man, that she'll go through more for love than a man will? Does a man stick to a woman when she's turned out bad—as a rule—?"

Varick laughed, harshly, strangely. His hand was on the knob; his body partly into the hall-way. The dim red glow of a frosted bulb made his face, half lighted, seem prematurely old and wan, though it was a rugged face.

"A man doesn't—stick. The woman may suffer the torments of the damned for him, but if she slips once— We're a selfish lot. Goodnight."

Varick always left one baffled and questioning. You had to think if you talked with Varick and after you left him you were still thinking. There had been something real, away from his usual philosophizing, in his admission that men are harsh towards a woman's sins. But had it been from his own experience that he spoke? Were there in his past, a past that Starr had pictured as serene and unmarked by unpleasantness of any sort, some tangled happenings, some cataclysm of human relations, some clash of emotions out of which had emerged this Varick he knew—the student, the dreamer, the shunner of life's hard ways? It might be. Varick never spoke of himself; especially he never spoke of women in relation to himself. He was the son of a British couple who had lived for a while in Montreal. He had been taken to England at an early age. School and travel, seemingly, had been his whole life. He was cosmopolitan. But there must have been women and, after all, women furnish men's greatest adventures.

So mused Starr, while overhead Varick's steps sounded lightly as he moved about before settling down with a book or to his easel. He, like Starr, was nocturnal. Until two or three o'clock and later, lights would shine out from the gabled house on Mount Pleasant while its bachelor occupants pursued their work.

Starr sat idly in his arm-chair and looked at the rough brown oak of the table-top, of the big library table where he worked. There was a sheaf of paper on it, and several pencils. There was work to be done. But tonight he did not feel like working. There was unrest in his blood. His study, that usually afforded him peace, did not do so now. It had been a sanctuary whereto sneers and hurts could not penetrate; behind its shut door, sheltered by its walls, he could drop the masque that was his buckler and be himself,

his boyish, unafraid self. But neither shut doors nor sturdy walls could keep out the vision of Esther Pym.

There she stood on the red rug below the orange-globed lights, her hands on her swelling hips, her breasts faintly revealed through a filmy shining dress of black, lacy, terminating just at her knees. And her eyes held his and invited, and her lips were parted.

Starr shut his eyes and shook his head and swore. When he opened them Esther Pym lay on his couch and her eyes were almost closed, yet still they looked at him and he prayed to such gods as he knew to spare him this. He reviled himself for his weakness and swore he would fight temptation down. He read, he walked about his room, he flung his casement open and looked down on the sleeping city and up at the waking stars. Esther Pym's face was on the page, she walked by him, she called to him from the Valley and the stars wrote things unclean across the blue tablet of the sky.

No peace. Ah, yes, here was peace. At first it seemed unreal, like fairy music dancing over the hill, playful, mischievous, tempting. But it came from above, from Varick's study and Starr knew that visitors were there. A violin and a viola playing counterpoint. It was rich, it was rare. But Starr frowned after listening a while. What were they doing? That first piece was a minuet of Lully, then the hideous perversion of a modern jazz-piece, then part of Die Freichutz.

Starr slipped into his coat of black velvet and went upstairs. He couldn't work, he didn't want to sleep. If Varick had been alone he would not have gone, but Varick had company and he would be welcomed. It was Hugo Ferrer who played the viola with Varick.

Starr knocked and opened the door. There was a smoke haze. Roderick Dhu, an immense Highland collie, lay across the threshold. Roderick Dhu was a blue-blooded fellow and exceedingly polite, but he was old and a bit stiff and slow to rise. He always jacked himself up and down by slow degrees. Starr stepped over him with a grin and a word of greeting. Roderick Dhu looked gratefully up at him and jacked himself down again from the few inches he had risen. He was Hugo Ferrer's dog and had a soul.

Hugo Ferrer and Varick stood over a figure recumbent in Varick's chair. They argued. Hugo gestured with his bow. He was a short dynamic man, keen eyed, hawk-nosed. He had abnormally long and strong fingers. He was a musician. In the chair was another musician, who had taken the count. He would not awaken.

"Your aid, Starr," said Varick gravely. "What tune will awaken yon piccolo-player? We have tried Lully, Irving Berlin and Weber. They won't work. As you see, he sits there 'mute, motionless, aghast.' Shaking and pinching have failed to bring him to. He walked—yes, walked this far with Hugo Ferrer; but this state of coma must not be prolonged."

Starr gazed in awe at the piccolo-player, a long thin fellow called Buller, who was a casual associate of Hugo Ferrer's. Buller's head was thrown back over the chair so far that it looked alarmingly as if his neck was broken, but his vigorous snoring and occasional stentorian grunts showed him to be very much alive.

"Ah, wait!" Hugo Ferrer raised his bow and stood poised like a bird. "I have it—Debussy! Eugene cannot bear Debussy. Behold!"

Hugo marched to the phonograph, put down his viola, shuffled the dusty records, found one and played it—*L'après-midi d'un faune*. Sure enough, Buller shook his head in subconscious dissent from the difficult harmony. He made faces and, sitting up, called "Stop!" in a sonorous voice. Then he looked vacantly around and grinned inanely. He had a fierce moustache and high cheek bones, ruby lips and small grey eyes.

Hugo removed the record and laughed hugely. Starr sat down by Varick on the red couch. Hugo Ferrer and the piccolo-player were in fine fettle. Buller had no intentions whatever of going to sleep, or indeed of going any place. He fixed Hugo with a cold and fishy stare.

"Dogs have no souls," he said in his piping voice, decisively. "No souls."

Hugo put his viola under his right arm and let his bow dangle from his right forefinger. He produced a loose cigarette from the pocket of his grey Norfolk coat, followed it with a match, lit, smoked with gusto.

"You're a big fool," said Hugo with the utmost amiability. "That dog has more of what passes for soul than you have."

"Clashmaclaver," said Varick. "Be seated, Hugo."

Hugo frowned judicially, blinked and sat down in Varick's swivel-chair, facing the company.

"By clashmaclaver you mean balderdash, I presume." He reprimanded Varick, who was only egging him on and probably was quite willing to believe that dogs had very good souls. "You are like Eugene, Varick—a

doubting Thomas. You have only to hear me to understand that in the old dog there is a power transcending yours or mine. Come here, boy."

Old Roderick Dhu jacked himself up and came with that peculiar half-lope, half-amble, characteristic of senile collies, towards his master and lay at his feet, his muzzle across the toe of Hugo's black brogue.

"Some fish story," said Buller, scratching his thin, mouse-coloured hair and tucking in his shirt cuff, which was a bit frayed and, drunken though he was, offended his scrupulous love of cleanliness.

"Truth," said Hugo cryptically. "Roderick Dhu's master is in Sing Sing."

"Eh!" Buller gaped and Varick, in high glee, nudged Starr. He went to his cabinet and produced brandy, which Hugo and Buller drank neat and in quantity, while the two younger men barely tasted of it.

"I said in Sing Sing," continued Hugo. "In prison for killing women, three or four, I forget just how many."

"No matter," said Buller gravely, with a wave of his hand. "No matter."

"I believe it was four. That was a fellow named Gershwin, a darned good fiddler. He used to beat Roderick Dhu, but, just the same, a collie never forgets his first master. Now, this has happened—this that I'm about to tell you—several times, but notably last Sunday. Roderick Dhu wouldn't look at me, wouldn't come when I called or take his food. He just sat and whined and whined and looked far off with those big, sad brown eyes. I couldn't do anything with him. At noon he was missing. All afternoon and all night he stayed away. Early Monday morning I found him lying in the door of a book-seller's on King Street, almost dead, for he's very old now. He came home with me then. Seemed glad to see me."

Hugo studied his cigarette and looked keenly at Buller.

"Well, what, if anything, does that prove?"

Hugo started, sighed. His eyes were dreamy.

"I'll tell you: I received a letter from Gershwin the Tuesday following. In it he told me how lonesome he was—for his dog, how he'd been thinking, thinking of Roderick Dhu and wanting him—do you see, Buller? Poor Gershwin there in his cell, God knows how many miles away, calling to his dog and old Roderick whining and looking, always looking into nothingness —"

Starr felt the hair prickle on his neck. Hugo sat like a little seer, hunched up, his cigarette dangling from his lips. His voice was eery. Varick nodded slowly. Buller was impressed.

"That's great, Hugo," said Varick. "Sublime."

"Just the same, you're a heretic, Hugo," said Buller sullenly. "An unbeliever."

"I am privileged to think for myself." Hugo drew himself up as if to impress Buller with his towering ability to think. "I don't take what other men give me and swallow it with open mouth. And if, by thinking, I reach conclusions different from yours, am I therefore a heretic? You are medieval. You and a lot like you need to be driven into the sea. Intolerant apes."

"What are you, anyway?" Buller was contentious. "Last month you were a Unitarian; the month before, a Rosicrucian."

"I have gone back to Confucius," announced Hugo. "Father of all sages."

"Old Chink," muttered Buller.

They indulged then in a much involved, tailless, headless argument about various religions; and in much brandy.

"What's it matter what I am?" was the sum of Hugo's argument. "Is a Unitarian fiddler different from a Baptist fiddler? I'm trying to do the best I can, what's the difference if I don't believe what the next fellow believes? That's the big drag on progress, my friends; the fact that a writer, poet or painter must, in the minds of the morons, be marked out as belonging to some sect or other, hence hostile to all the rest or barely tolerant of them. That's bad business; any worthwhile man wants freedom, not servitude. Look at Starr there, my young friend Graham; if he were forced to play in one key he would probably turn out to be another Hilaire Belloc, which may God forbid!"

"Amen," said Starr fervently.

Starr was back in his room before Hugo and Buller left, with Roderick Dhu bobbing along in their uncertain track down Mount Pleasant. Hugo's viola was in its case under his arm. Starr watched him, paying little attention to Buller. Starr, when a boy, had studied with Hugo Ferrer and learned to love the idealism that, though he perhaps knew it not, was really his religion, well lived up to. It was always refreshing to talk to Hugo. For Hugo, violins,

too, had souls and often in the small hours of the night had Starr sat before the hearth in the musician's studio and heard the maestro talk of repairing old Strads and Cremonas and finding something of the personality of the original makers in them, a sort of aura about them, transmitted by the loving hands that had fashioned them, that still clung about them after hundreds of years had gone. A strange man was Hugo Ferrer. Starr knew that when the little man walked in the woods with his dog he felt the fairy folk a-dancing, and saw gnomish faces peer out at him from behind tree trunks and grey moss-grown rocks.

And, though Graham Starr, himself something of a cosmopolite and wanderer in far places, feigned to despise the quaint city of his birth and its quaint people, even as Leopardi hated and reviled Recanati, he secretly loved it and found quiet joys therein that no other place could have afforded. The sun made red magic behind the dark heights of Lancaster and in the summer mornings early the dew sparkled fair on the grass and the robin's note was sweet. In the busy crowded market, in the bustling streets, there was an intimate, warming touch that only small communities enjoy. People knew people and were curious about those they did not know. Perhaps that was why Starr felt bitter towards them at times. They peeked and pried or stared openly with no idea that anyone could possibly take offence at being stared at. When he walked with Denise Raye the questing eyes were upon him and her and tongues wagged, sometimes kindly, often cruelly; for even where there is nothing to talk about, the little people will make something.

That was what Starr called them, the little people. He could find no other term so comprehensive. So concentrated, so constricted, so utterly narrow do provincial folk become. He had to wear a masque—of boredom, of disdain, of open contempt. He would not, could not be one of them. They formed a terrific force which with Denise as his ally he had to combat. Fortunately he had enjoyed the education of travel, the fine influence of living in the large places of the world, the fellowship of university life, and even in his resentment and disgust he could smile and think pityingly of how much that really mattered was a dark, never-to-be-known mystery to the little people.

He had other allies. Varick was one, and Hugo Ferrer. But Varick shunned entirely the life of the community and Hugo Ferrer, though imbued with ideas wild and subversive, was at heart in sympathy and accord with the townsfolk. He was older; he knew them better. He could not feel bitterness; only a grim joy in the weird phenomena of parochialism.

Hugo went to church, sometimes, to play; not to pray; at least not in the orthodox fashion.

"I sat there one night," he told Starr. "And looked down from the choir loft on those sweaty, smelly specimens of humanity, packed like sardines in board boxes that were pews, listening to a big fish and hypnotized right out of their own thoughts. Man, I could have shouted at them. It made me sick. Then my eyes wandered about and I found a poem and it was a prayer and the light shone upon me—it was a wood carving of John baptizing the Messiah and there was genius in it—a rough, pure genius. I knew him who had made it. Ah, there was everything good and worthwhile in that carving and in its contemplation I found a fullness, a satisfying something."

Starr's most constant ally was Solitude. In the deserted streets at night when no eyes were there to make him wear the masque; in the hour of dawn when the world seemed free and the city had not awakened to clank its fetters and build its prison-bars around him; when he wandered alone along the docks and saw huge slings of merchandise borne from the holds of battered tramp-steamers that wore upon them, like kitbags stuck with labels, the marks of distant places where there was smell of spice and naked little brown boys dived into blue waters.

At sunset time in the harbour, fishermen spread their nets and hauled in the gleaming catch; the ferry to Carleton ploughed back and forth among them and Starr would see the picture change, the houses and piers vanish, the boats become birch-canoes of Membertou and his savage warriors, who once dwelt on the little island at the river mouth. In fancy he could see the stockaded fort of La Tour, the blue smoke rising into the crimson sky; hear the sentry's loud "*Qui vive?*" Yes, time and the years dropped quickly away from the ancient city. Still on the lofty height of Fort Howe the cannons pointed their threatening maws out towards the dark waters of Fundy, useless guardians now, but eloquent of a day when they were the watch-dogs of the little settlement that nestled below them.

Days when the city was wrapped in thick fog, and rain fell, he loved to walk along the docks and hear the dismal, lonely clangour of the bell-buoys in the mist, the muffled moan of the fog-horn on Partridge Island. The gulls' cry was the same that had greeted Champlain's ears and a few miles beyond the city was the forest, as virgin as it had been when the bold Gentlemen of France first set foot upon the soil. In the contemplation of these things he was happy, but his soul was never free from fear.

That nameless, inexplicable fear, so insane, so unreasoning; fear of criticism, fear of the rowdy's laugh, of the brazen girl's smile, of the fool's snicker. They knew him; oh, yes, they knew him and because he was not as they, he was disliked and because he would not in any way cede to them he was buffeted and assailed from all sides. He must not be different, he must not be independent, he must think as they, talk as they, act as they—if he would have that peace which results from being ignored.

But Starr was cursed with the wish to be himself, to go his way in peace. He molested no one, had he not the right to go unmolested? Surely he should enjoy that right, but only at a cost which to his sensitive and even timid soul was far too great. He could not cultivate a tough hide, a leathern provincial hide. He was human, tolerant, kind, but they were not. The interpretations they put on life, their supreme conformity with what their fathers had done, their flaming resentment of anything new or different or better, their middle-class hatred of the very things they secretly longed to do, of the very people they most envied—surely inhuman.

"Their sins are greater than those of Sodom and Gomorrah," said Starr. "For there is no greater sin than intolerance; no vice more hideous than jealousy. Peace—can I find peace among them?"

The answer was yes, if he could be one of them, if he could hate and talk meanness about his betters, if he could dash the ice water of cynicism on all things warm and real, if he could take a mental pabulum of slander and gossip and feed like food to those about him, if, in a word, he could travel with the bourgeois and have the bourgeois mind.

There was flight. He entertained the idea often, but he was loath to forsake the battleground, the issue undecided. It would be an ignominious, beaten flight and there would be many to laugh and say he was afraid of them. No, he would not go, unless he could go in triumph; yet if he stayed he felt that his soul would be stifled, that all he planned to do would perish for want of freedom.

To the psychologist, Starr's case was clearly that of an exaggerated sense of inferiority, a paradox in one who was by no means an inferior person. He recognized the fact himself, yet could not overcome it. He would not be himself. But he faced life doggedly, this provincial life, and vowed to beat it and humiliate it and indulge at the hour of triumph in the passing tribute of a sneer—one only sneer for the thousands that, he thought, had been levelled at him from the little people.

CHAPTER III

The assault had been well planned; it was flawlessly executed. Diarmid's wiry little arms twined about Mona's neck and as he bore her to the floor Pat sat down on her legs. Then Diarmid with deft, ungentle fingers pulled out her teeth, a gleaming new set of uppers.

"Ha, ha!" He waved them gleefully and thrust them close up under Pat's nose for inspection. "Old tight wouldn't let us see her teeth. There they are, Pat. Pretty nice, too."

Mona struggled and protested and mouthed words of violence, but her voice sounded funny.

"She can't talk straight without her teeth," grinned Pat. "Better put them back."

"Let her up, you little fiends."

Denise drifted into the hall and stirred the group that looked like a sort of Laocoön without the serpent or The Wrestlers with clothes and the referee mixed in. Denise dispersed them with a few minor sarcasms and a counsel to Mona to have her teeth cemented in if she wished to keep them long.

A fortnight had passed since Graham Starr told her that Esther Pym had begun to walk, not a figure of light, in his life. Graham had come several times, but he was altered. He was preoccupied and his thoughts were not often with her. His speech had not its old directness, force and fire. His face was thinner and his eyes showed that he slept not so much as was needful.

Denise was troubled. Hers was a strongly dominant nature, possessive in that high degree that a woman's nature often is. She had looked upon Graham Starr as hers, yet she had never made any effort to make him hers. Now she had no bonds to hold him to her. The truth was there to be faced. He was free. She could not say to him as a wife could, "You are unfaithful to me. You are acting like a cad." Unlike a mistress, she could not reproach him or hold up to him all she had given and sacrificed.

"It's impossible," she reflected, "to keep a man without love, to make him exclusively your own. And I want Graham. He is mine. He will always be mine. But he awakens no desire in me. I do not want his kisses, nor his arms about me. Yet I am lovely as this woman, this strange creature who

troubles him. I should be able to exert the same power over him as she does. But I have never tried to let him know I am a woman. I've kept that part of me well away from his eyes. And to invite his love now when nothing in me asks for it would be only a prostitution of myself. Still I cannot let him go. If I did I should always regret him and never forgive myself. But I don't know what I want of him. I can scarcely believe that he would take this woman seriously and have to do with her. But men have done stranger things and the fact that she is some kind of a thing would not deter Graham if he felt he really loved her. It's only desire, passion, that he feels; it can be nothing more."

But Esther Pym had entered deeper into the heart of Graham Starr. In the market, between long rows of shelves laden with pansies, roses and phlox in a galaxy of gay red, purple, blue and white, Starr had come face-to-face with Esther Pym. Face-to-face in broad daylight and close to her as they passed, jostled by the buyers and by the country folk from whose rough clothing a strong smell came and overpowered the scent of the flowers.

Their eyes met, in his a questioning, in hers a challenge and Starr's heart skipped a beat. There was something about her— His hands clenched strongly and when she pressed against him his senses seemed to leave him. Like a strong electric current some force had been transmitted from her arm to his. His eyes had seen the beauty of her mouth, an imperfect, loose beauty that was not good, that apparently contradicted all the canons of the Beautiful, but that made him want to press his mouth to hers and hurt her. While he knew in his inmost heart that he could not hurt her, that whatever fire, however ardent and destroying, was in him, a greater one lay dormant in the breast of Esther Pym. There was strength in her movements, in the full beauty of the physical organism that the gods had endowed her withal. She was the incarnation of something—was it lust, was it holy love, was it womanhood at its worst? He did not know.

But he desired her. Yes, he no longer could obfuscate the reality of his desire. All his arguments against wanting her were as sand castles wiped out by the inrushing tide of her power. His eyes followed her as she passed along to where the pink and white bodies of slain lambs hung on great red hooks and men in aprons held quarters of meat in their big hands and waited with the cleaver for a customer's decision.

Esther Pym haggled with a bearded old wretch over a hind quarter and Starr watched her eagerly, exulting in her beauty, the sophisticated, mature beauty of the woman who has been through the mill, the beauty that appeals far more to what moralists call the baser instincts than innocence ever does.

Starr looked at her till she got her parcel and wended her way through the crowd to the swing doors and passed through. The market then was an empty place. He wanted to follow her, to look upon her, but something that might have been shame held him back. Everyone knew Esther Pym and his spirit cowered when he thought of what the city would do and say if it were known that he loved her.

Was there only one Varick, only one person who would understand and deny that stiff distinction between good women and bad? Was it sin to love Esther Pym? Because she was bad, was it a bad thing to love her? Starr did not feel that he had hurt anyone by desiring her, he did not feel that he had violated any law or trod on the toes of any frowning deity. He was Epicurean, this young man, and his view of life was too often a partial one, a momentary one.

This was the first day of September, drunken with yellow sunlight and only a few dead leaves fell on the grass that was still bright with the green of summer. The cool of the wind and the warmth of the sun made a finely equable atmosphere and because it was Saturday the streets were crowded with elders bent on doing their Sunday buying. In the long high-raftered building that was the market, small boys shouted, "Carry!" and darted among the crowd looking for baskets of meat and vegetables to lug. On the shelves were walls of yellow butter in pound blocks and fat tub-molds with dainty flowers and borders stamped on the top. There was celery, ghastly white and greenish yellow, gay green lettuce, red cabbage and new carrots of a warm ruddy hue. There were long rows of fowl all plucked and ready for roasting, lashed as to the legs like criminals, together, their breast bones up, their parts exposed to be felt for their age by the practiced hand of thrifty buyers. Baskets of big eggs, tan, brown and white; dyed rugs of sheep skin coloured flamboyantly, blue, gold and red.

Indians were there in wretched raiment selling moccasins, slippers, baskets woven of willow strips, tiny bows and arrows for children. A broken little Indian on crutches had a big crate of blueberries and a few boxes of raspberries and gooseberries. He looked expectantly, optimistically, at the crowds that passed, and made a ceremony of each sale, gesturing woodenly from the elbows and praising his berries. Cleavers thudded on giant wooden blocks, rending bone and sinew; knives clicked on whet-stones. The clerk of the market pursued a dog with angry shouts, scaring the brute into dropping the bloody liver he had stolen. Smell of raw red meat, of tallow, of flowers, of country folk's garments, babel of tongues, scolding, laughter, haggling, and Graham Starr standing motionless and thinking of Esther Pym—

At the entrance to the market he met Hugo Ferrer and his dog. Hugo wore always a battered felt hat with the brim pulled low, Norfolk jacket, a black bow-tie and low collar. He eschewed gloves, those perfect white hands of his seemed not to feel the effects of the weather. They did not tan in summer, did not chap in winter. He carried a stout stick. Starr had not set eyes on Hugo Ferrer since the night of brandy and disputation. Starr walked by his side. In the distance Esther Pym crossed the street.

"Well, Graham, what occupies you today? What are you doing to further the formation of our literature?"

"I am pursuing a woman," admitted Starr. "Supposedly a bad woman."

"My God, man dear! There's something woefully wrong with you. I didn't detect it in your writings, but I see it in your words. Some of the winds of mysticism blow in the far corners of your soul. But surely you don't contemplate life in terms of cinema stories about good and bad women! There's no fundamental difference whatever."

"You talk like Varick," said Starr, smiling slowly. His smile was rarely spontaneous, but it lasted longer than most smiles, as if he contemplated every possible humorous aspect of a thing before letting it go.

"I talk like all wise men," continued Hugo. "Like all those who look beyond the petty things of life. But I don't believe you're serious, Graham, when you talk like that."

"Perhaps not."

"But women are the same, minds alike, bodies alike. Their actions, of course, are shaped by arbitrary things like religion, belief, surroundings, men."

"You've never gone in much for women, my master?" questioned Starr. There persisted between these two the old relation of pupil to master. Perhaps Hugo Ferrer saw in this tall young man with the grave eyes and humorous mouth—saw still a little boy in brown corduroy who plugged furiously at scales and triads and modes and measures, who tackled music as he would have tackled handball or rugger, with the same dogged will to beat it and make it his, a timid boy withal, who banked much on a smile or a word of praise, who suffered for days and days when censure came his way, sensitive to an appalling degree.

"No; I've never bothered much with women," said Hugo, hastening Roderick Dhu's laggard steps with a touch of his stick. "You can pack every possible experience of woman into a single hour. Then there's nothing else

to be learned. That is, woman considered from the viewpoint of love. But take minds and books and events—there's an ever-changing panorama. I've looked skeptically on that 'nothing new under the sun' quotation. There's lots that is startling, if not new. Every time I pick up a violin I find something new, something refreshing. It's hard to understand that people, some of them, most of them, should find life a bore. It's their own fault, not life's. Why, life is the most entertaining of things. It's a grand show. It can make you laugh, make you cry, exalt you, depress you—if you'll just leave yourself open to it. So many people hide from it and try to wall themselves in with pride and snobbery, with pretence and hypocrisy."

"Then do you show your real self to life?"

"I do. As you see and know Hugo Ferrer, so he is. I've never played a part, except the one allotted me. I've never acted, perhaps that's why I'm not rich in the world's goods, not high in the world's estimation, because I've never worn the masque, never put my foot in the buskin, never tried to be other than I am."

"I envy you," said Starr. "I can't be like that. I'm always on the defensive, always with my hands up to protect me, ready to fight with them."

"And, tell me honestly, do you ever have to use your hands, have to fight?"

"Honestly, I don't think I've ever really needed to, except to save my pride and shield my sensitiveness."

"And that's it. You're militant when you might be at peace. You walk among fancied perils. You think every man's hand is against you. Like a sensitive plant you spring away from the least, hostile contact, and you see hostility in every contact. I've known you since you were a boy, Graham; you haven't changed. You probably never will. You could own all the wealth, all the joy in the world, but life would still treat you rough. If you were a king, a fool's jeer could make you feel like a beggar; if you had your heart's desire it could be embittered by an idiot's laugh. To you, ridicule is the monster of the universe. You hate to have people look at you, talk about you. It gives you spiritual convulsions. You fancy the most impossible and hateful things. You're never at peace."

"Right," admitted Starr. "Right, to the last word, Hugo. But what's to be done about it? One's hand becomes calloused to the teacher's stick or pointer, the blows cease to hurt very much. But one's spirit, certainly not mine, won't become hardened. It is as you say, I'd rather suffer physical

torment than have harsh things said about me. While I feign to scorn the opinion, good or bad, of the rabble, I'd give anything to stand in well with it."

"You're a sad case." Hugo shook his head. They had stopped now before his door. Roderick Dhu barked. It was near lunch-time and Roderick always barked, anyway, when Hugo stopped to converse, for sometimes arguments would develop and lunch be forgotten.

"Then you can't prescribe for me?" Starr spoke jestingly, but he prayed that Hugo Ferrer would take him in earnest. If any man could give him a remedy for his ills, it was Hugo. But the cure for what ailed him lay within himself and Hugo could do nothing.

"I cannot. You may go through life like that; I don't know. Sometimes I think you will. One doesn't alter much after twenty-five. That sensitiveness —it's a painful thing, it causes you untold and needless misery; but don't you see that without it you wouldn't be yourself. You could not, deprived of that quicksilver of reaction, see life as you do, as closely, as intimately and vitally. It's the gift you have, Graham. The gods gave it to you to be always a child in your susceptibility to hurt, in your quickness of response to praise or blame. I envy you it, even while I pity you. It must be hell to have a spirit so finely tuned, so strung that the least breeze causes vibration. That what awakens no response in the ordinary man makes sound in you shuddering dissonances, or glorious tumbling chords. But I wax poetic and a bit crazy. Forgive me. I've always loved you, boy. I can talk to you. Goodby."

A great little man, Hugo. Much like Varick, but with a wider range of imaginative power, a wilder concept of life, a bit given to the morbid. Serene, but with a serenity bought, it seemed to Starr, at a price. And perhaps deep in him he had wars that Starr could not guess at, that he himself would never avow. He said that he was himself, always; and never acted a part. But all men did, even those who thought they were natural were acting the part of being natural. And no man, except perhaps Christ, ever fully showed himself to the world. You just can't do it. If you do, they'll put you in a cell and give you a number, either as a mental or a moral maniac, the distinction between these terms being the difference between straitjackets and stripes.

One couldn't be oneself. Oh, there were so many things to keep one from it. Starr walked back to Mount Pleasant. So many things— This girl, Esther Pym—he wanted her more than he had ever wanted any woman. What exactly does a man want from a woman such as Esther? But it was

more than that with Starr. He did not look at a woman to lust after her. Very human, he; so he felt it would be a bit of fine madness to rest in her embraces. But, apart from that, there was the fascination, not of her body with its rare rich beauty, but of herself. She must have a philosophy, no doubt a very practical philosophy. Perhaps she knew men.

But she would be different from other women he had met; widely different, he told himself with youthful sophistry. What folly to fancy she would be so different—she, a woman! The wise words of Varick, of Hugo Ferrer passed unheeded—saint or harlot, good women or bad; all one, they said; the distinction invidious. And this child looked to find a new toy in Esther Pym, who paraded her shame among men. Very well, sometimes the child's fondest hopes are realized. At any rate, there was for him the joy of hoping, of being uncertain.

And that's a lot of the joy in love; when you're still isolated from its object, when she's far out of your reach, when all about her is glamour and the halo of your love for her. When her hair is far distant gold and her eyes are blue-flags by a pond you cannot reach, when her mouth is a frightened paradise and just to think of placing your arm about the slim rondeur of her waist is to make the world travel like a roundabout. No pleasures in life are comparable to the gradual and complete attainment of those far hopes; no happiness so great as yours if they remain ever fair to you when you have attained them; no pain so searing as which results when they have become tasteless and unwanted.

A wise man loves only once; for one finds, if one looks well, as much in one love as in a hundred. One woman epitomizes all women, if you love her. And here it is love not divorced from passion, but love that comprises passion, that is shot through and through with passion of the purest, most human, most animal sort. Out of matrimony it's called lust, an inane distinction. For without lust matrimony is a hearth without fire, a lamp without flame. A shameful word, lust; yet a strong, pure and most living word; a word confined to passion only, yet one that can figure well in the other things of life. To live one's work strongly is to lust in it; to play with all your heart is to play lustily. Lust o' life, that's the thing, to live each moment with all that's in you, to lust in it.

On the slopes of Mount Pleasant, trees were thick and green with their leaves and the grass was green and towers and gables, red-roofed, slate-roofed showed above the waving tops. Life is good on a sunny day and Starr alone in all the world, it seemed to him, was discontent. This answer he wanted from life—where was it, and what?

That night Denise Raye and Graham Starr walked the bridge. In Saint John, walking the bridge is a sport not indulged in by many. It was about five miles around. They started at Wadham Street and walked until they came to the great spandrel arch over the rushing falls at the mouth of the River Saint John. On the bridge they loitered for a while, then walked up through the asylum grounds, out Lancaster and down through Carleton to the little ferry that took them across the harbour to the city.

It was a pleasant circuit. Summer and winter, fair weather or foul, they walked it, once, twice, sometimes three in a week, with long easy steps, shoulder to shoulder, heel and toe. They loved the open road these two, though their open road was the long wide reaches of the city's less travelled streets. To them both, the feel of the wind on their faces, the gentle wind of September, the furious, icy blast of January, was an elixir. Denise Raye's glowed with a deep rose colour and her eyes sparkled and the wisps of her hair blew out bewitchingly.

She wore this night a tailored-suit of blue serge, a fawn hat of nameless shape that might have been stolen from a vagabond elf. She sported stout tiny fawn brogues and her heels clicked merrily. She was a trim little craft, mused Starr, neat as a trivet, cut clean, made on a perfect mold. But so self-possessed, so sure and reliant on her own good powers.

Relations were a bit strained tonight. Esther Pym walked between them all the way. When they stood on the bridge and looked over the iron railing down at the black, foam-streaked race of waters through the gorge, Esther Pym separated them, and the huge dark rocks, the webby framework of the railway-bridge, the voice of the waterfall, were not poetic. In the moonlight the river waters, rushing down, fought and tumbled like a herd of wild white horses.

They did not stay long there. They climbed the hill on which were perched the long brick buildings of the asylum. It was a grim place, where stumps of trees looked like old men crouched and ready to spring upon one, where a blowing sheet of paper seemed a white face coming towards one, where wild cries from among the hundreds of sick minds there confined came out like screams from hell and crazy faces were pressed wanly against the bars.

"Take me home! For God's sake take me home!" a woman screamed. But there was no answer; only the trees rustled an eternal denial outside the mad one's window and a tall clock chimed the hour of nine.

From the heights they saw the city's lamps shimmering out their golden corkscrews on the waters of the harbour. They saw the river bend its swan's neck into a mouth and pour itself into the brine. The stars had a steady light and the moon looked smug, impassive. Shouts of boys, late at their play, came up from the slopes below, a gull flew seaward with a single staccato screel. A street-car crossed the bridge, its lights travelling in a gradual arc.

They had talked very little. Their kinship was always one of mind; it was strange that it should have been disrupted by a matter of the senses, but there it was. Starr wondered if he should be with her, if a man who loved another woman had any business at all with a second. But why not? Couldn't they be as man-to-man, as they had always been? They never spoke of love, so why should things be different?

Yet different they were. Other times he had been, if not in love with her, in love with no other woman either. She could be serene. But not now.

"Did you see Esther Pym today?" she asked, but her voice had not the catty, jealous inflection that is the mark of a question put by a woman about her rival. There was, indeed, a strange rivalry here, the conflict of mind and matter, of soul and body. Was it reasonable to expect a man to forsake one woman's body for another's soul?

"I saw her in the market," he returned, with no suggestion of "what of it?" to follow.

"And was she fair?"

"Yes."

"As I am fair?"

"No."

"Talk, Gray. You're different of late. You're not the same to me as you were. We don't understand each other. Other nights you brought good companions with you and I knew them and we all talked—remember? Stevenson, a fine gentleman; Trollope, a rough, hearty country-squire laughing over his fox-hunts, John Donne and Dick Lovelace?"

"Oh, yes, I remember well, Denise. But I—I've sort of lost my friends. They've all dropped into the background, seemingly, watching me and leaving me to fight things out myself, waiting to see how I'll find life and whether or not I can deal with it as well as they did."

"Am I in the background, too?"

On Lancaster, cars slid by, their headlights rushing down in a blaze of white fire, the sound of their motors waning as they passed on. Trees arched over the walk and shadows lay like black pools on the pallor of the concrete.

"You are not, Denise. You are here with me and I must admit I'm a bit at a loss. There's never been anything approaching love between you and me, not even the love of brother and sister. Ours has been a friendship, pure and simple, and in anything else I could talk to you and ask your advice. But, pshaw, I wouldn't take it, any more than I could heed Varick's or Hugo Ferrer's. A man just won't be advised about some things. And I misdoubt you could advise me about a woman, since you're one yourself."

"Oh, very well."

Denise tightened her little mouth and her eyes, which he could not see, were glistening, hard. How greatly men underrate women and think to brush them, their opinions, aside with a careless wave of the hand. Folly. Women have always ruled men's destinies—determined women, consistent women. What a paradox, that last!

And Denise was determined that this man would belong to no other woman. If only she had some hold on him beyond the negligible bond of their friendship, which, after all, was only a friendship of mind, not vital, not marked with an intimate touch of warmth. She carried woman's strongest weapon, yet unsheathed—the woman of her. But Graham Starr had never sought for the woman of her. She had shown him or any man no fire, no passion, no wantonness. Those forces had never been awakened in her. She had been too strong, too independent, to ever wish to cling to a man, to let her weakness be his strength, to annihilate herself before him. She had never melted.

That he should love Esther Pym tortured her. That he should dip into the hot vat of passion while she stood aloof, roused some resistance in her. If he had asked her to take the sinful bath with him she would most surely have refused. It repelled her. She had no desire to partake of this love that he felt for Esther Pym.

"It may be just dog-in-the-manger," she thought. "I don't want him like that. Yet I can't bear to think of another's having him. I still can't believe he would want her—that way." The thought of Esther Pym in Graham's arms was an ugly one, Esther Pym clasped close to him, her lips against his, her eyes looking into his with terrible exultation. She shivered. Somewhere in Paul Bourget she had read of what seemed to her a similar case, of a loose woman and an innocent boy losing for the first time his innocence with her

—and the light in her eyes was bestial when she knew that he had never sinned before.

"Have you ever sinned—like—?"

"No," he said coldly. "I've never sinned, as you put it. I've been clean, so to speak, chaste. I don't pride myself on it."

"I suppose not." But it was a relief, yet a hurt, to know that. A relief to think that no other woman had called him hers; a hurt to feel that the first might be an unworthy one, an Esther Pym.

"I have no right to bother," she said defiantly, wistfully. "It's your business, I suppose. You're free to go your own way. But does it occur to you—" She was going to say, "does it occur to you that it might hurt me?" She didn't. So he finished.

"That I would be doing wrong if I loved where I chose to love? It does not. I've always fought hard for freedom and held to it grimly. I should never have told you of this girl, should never have told anyone. I ought, I suppose, to have been ashamed that she could make me care for her."

"You don't even know her."

"I feel as if I'd always known her."

"Surely. You've always known what you now find in her. Why don't you call things by their names? Is your feeling for her any different, any better, any way less rotten than that of the men who buy her love—?"

"It is." He smiled sadly. "I pride myself it is."

"Perhaps, O Paphnuce, you would save the soul of this courtesan and bring her even unto the altar of God—unselfishly?"

He looked defiantly at her.

"Perhaps I would," he said.

CHAPTER IV

Esther Pym was not unlike the rest of women. She was proud of her beauty, she liked to attract men, she stood before mirrors and studied herself, she was susceptible to love. Witness her on the Saturday morning that Starr saw her in the market. She knew Starr, she had seen him often and liked him. He had given her a new thrill in her bosom, nor was it a tawdry thrill.

"He is no wolf," she had decided from the first. "He is good and he does not look at me like other men do. I could wash and scrub and mend for him. I wonder why he gives me even a glance. I see him often with that Raye girl, a good woman; and I'm not a good woman."

Sometimes Esther wept because she was not a good woman. She was no more hard-hearted than any other girl who has had a tough break in the game of scramble for your bread. Sociologists say that most women who follow the appalling career of shame do so for the joy of it and laugh when the righteous try to uplift them and save their souls; when holy women, dead from the neck up and the waist down, with a mechanical pump for a heart, speak to them in gentle, uplifting words and depict God to them as a rather dignified, sad-faced gentleman who holds their fate in His hand.

They know better. They've seen the real of life and its air visions don't impress them. At times, like all who wander from the laid out and supposedly beaten track of good behaviour, they become disgusted with their evil ways and long for a beatific freedom from the thrall of sin. But it's pretty hard to get away from a business like that and Esther Pym, forced into it in the beginning, saw no means of escape.

But for her mind, her soul if you will, there was escape; and what more natural than that she, to whom love had been an ugly thing, measured out in the beastly passions of men, should find surcease in a splendidly ideal and wholly unselfish adoration of the inaccessible—Graham Starr?

He, she could have sworn, was safe from her, as she was never likely to exchange so much as a word with him. So, among the tin cans, ashes, empty bottles and general squalour of her lot was born a white flower, the first and only real love of her life, love in its finest, noblest sense, love that had no prospect of fulfillment, that did not want the prosaic meed of kisses and embraces, that dared not think of a nifty bungalow and kiddies, a car and a

twenty-year endowment policy. Such love Esther Pym, a light woman, felt for Graham Starr—just a man.

It is wrong to make idols of persons you don't know, to cherish ideals that are incompatible with the human part of us. Why should Esther Pym have thought that Starr was different from the rest of men, that he would not feel for her what they felt, that the brute in him was not so savage as in anyone else? Why? Who could know? Why does a young woman think a pimply-faced, round-shouldered youth is just the finest thing God ever made and let him taste her lips and press her in his arms? Why does the mind of man figment such pretty things as cherubim and archangels and a happy land with golden cobbles in the streets? Why—just the desire for better things, for escape from the sordid and hurtful, for relief.

Esther Pym wore a smile on her full red lips that Saturday morning and the streets seemed clean. The sun warmed her. It was no harm to dream, to think of this young man with the wide forehead and big honest eyes, with the stern yet kind face and straight strong body. She could look at him, why not? She watched for him in the Common at night at the hour of his passing and if she sat with men, a man's arm was not around her when Graham passed. She would have been ashamed, for, strange as it may seem to good people, Esther Pym could feel shame and she would never flaunt her scarlet cloak in the face of Graham Starr.

Esther would not have been so happy if she had known that Starr was affected by her, that she had power to destroy the evenness of his life and bring ill visions into his quiet hours. She would have abjured, then, this fine emotion she felt for him, this delicate clean-spun web of dream and hope more remote of attainment than the zealot's hope of Elysium.

Her dream of him was not the coloured dream of the girl in love. True, she thought of summer in flowery meads where a brook ran busily and its cool water flashed on smooth stones and trout leaped in shadowed pools under the bending willow branches, where cattle stood inert beneath shade trees and daisy-tops were white. There in dreams she wandered with him and he talked to her and—just was with her, only that. She sought no more of him, certainly she sought not what other men, any man, could give—that burning thing called love.

To her he was a man divorced from passion, an ideal man. That he should want her materially, basely, humanly was far from her thoughts. She would have turned from him, hated him and wept as a child over her broken doll, if she had known that with him it could be so. Love, the passion love,

had ceased for her to be a glamorous thing. Sin, so called had stripped it of its glamour, surfeit had destroyed its bliss, sordidness blighted its beauty. Even with Graham Starr such love had no appeal for her, for the power to love like that, if not dead in her, would never be awakened, never nurtured by the fine feeling she had for him.

It was a new experience in her life and it came to her as overpoweringly sweet, as consoling, as filling to heart and breast as the viaticum given on the death-bed to the slow repentant sinner. It flooded light upon her, it seemed to make her white without and clean within, and as she climbed the stairs of the Rookery she sang an old song that somewhere in the dead, unreal past a sweet-faced, grey-eyed woman, her mother, had sung to two little girls who knelt on either side of her knees and looked up at her, the core of their world. Esther had long since ceased to weep over that vanished day, ceased to feel sick and deathly when its memory came to her. The sweet-faced mother had gone away before tears of anything but happiness came to her eyes, before the little girls grew up. The tiny white cottage on the shore of the broad Saint John was now to Esther Pym no more real than the fairy palace to those who, as children, have listened to the story of The Sleeping Princess.

The song made her smile now that she was old enough and wise enough to see how applicable it had been to her and Ruth,

> One got the kisses and kindly words,
> That was her dear Marie,
> One told her troubles to bees and birds,
> And that one was "Only Me."

Esther had been "Only Me." Esther had taken second place always to the flaxen-haired Ruth, of the ethereal face and great blue eyes, Esther who was dark as the woods of evergreen seen from afar, who was quiet and retiring and shy. Who had no voice for her own interests, who gave way to Ruth's. And Esther, because she was the elder, had taken the mother's place and had been to Ruth what the mother had been, unselfish, loving, spoiling.

The boy who lived with Esther Pym was Ruth's boy, but Ruth's shame was buried with her in a little grave-yard on a wind-swept hill where, too, her mother lay. Ruth's shame was buried with her and only one man knew, and the world when it said, "That's Esther Pym's brat—nameless," got no denial from Esther, for even in death Ruth was Ruth, while Esther was "Only Me."

Eric, the boy, a black-eyed, curly-haired little fellow, played with blocks in a sunny spot in the corner of the living room. He was more than wise in his generation, for bad men came to Esther's and the walls were thin and words came to him, that though he did not know their meaning, impressed him and were carried forth by him. Esther sometimes wept over Eric, wondering what his future would be. But she need not have worried, for Eric was of that precocious type that becomes either a great man or a great scoundrel and in either case does well of life. He was happy and, as far as he knew, Esther was his mother and quite as good a mother as a chap could want. He was just past eight.

Esther put her parcels on the table and took off her black straw hat. She walked to the window, talking to Eric the while, and peered out from behind the muslin curtains.

Across the street, in front of the Rayes', a green roadster, looking like a squat beetle, viewed from above, waited while Denise spoke with her mother on the steps. Diarmid, hands in pockets, lounged against the brickwork. Esther looked indifferently at Denise Raye. She did not envy Denise, for this tawny, blue-eyed girl, thoroughbred written in every inch of her slim body, could not hurt Esther's love for Starr. That was the beauty of her love. Doubtless, he would marry Denise and they would be very happy. But Esther would not be unhappy, because her love for him asked nothing, and did not feel hurt that he should mate with another woman.

It was only due that he should marry such as Denise. She was fine, thought Esther, in her green dress and white coat with its collar of white fox fur. The jaunty white felt hat set prettily on her unruly mane and her glance was fearless. She owed nothing to the world, this girl; she took nothing from it. To her its kindness mattered little since its rudeness mattered less. She breathed strength and independence and all those fine things that Esther Pym had missed—books, clubs, the conversation of the intelligent, the culture of college life. But Esther did not hate her nor feel jealousy, for did not she herself have the right to love the same man; if it must be from afar, if he must never know it!

Denise climbed into the car, tinkered with levers, and with a wave of her hand to her mother, drove up Wadham Street. She must be happy, thought Esther Pym, turning to look at Eric, who was throwing the blocks around; not many cares in her life, not much ugliness, a flood of sweetness that few things could embitter. Their lives were so widely different, yet they were both women; just that, and there was a baffling problem in the fact that life gave one so much of its goods, while the other received so little and that

little earned with the sacrifice of all the other held most precious. But this world has its roses that grow in tended gardens; its wild asters that have a beauty all their own in neglected lots and forgotten fields.

Denise Raye was not happy and Esther would have marvelled to know that she was in part the reason. Denise was impotent to understand why Graham should give serious thought to a woman like Esther Pym. Denise tried not to hate Esther Pym, but she was woman enough to hold her in scorn and to try to ignore her existence entirely. But since Graham thought of her, perhaps loved her, it was not easy to ignore her existence.

Graham knew what she was: a woman unworthy of a good man's regard. If he was a good man he should, as good men must do, turn his back on this strumpet and shun her. But Graham differed so much from men, and despised their opinion. Was he less a good man for that? She thought not. No waster he, she believed, no rake, no betrayer of innocence. If he loved this girl he would love her openly and honestly. He would be a fool to do so, of course. Perhaps in his quixotic way he hoped to reform her and make something good of her. It had been done—in books, where the woman with a past becomes the wife with a fair present and a fine future. But not in this little town and, oh, surely Graham would not attempt such a mad thing. The girl was beautiful in a sensuous, animal way, but that a man of Graham's education and sophistication should be impressed by that alone was hard for Denise to realize. She forgot that men have loved women worse than Esther Pym and have gone far for that love. She forgot that there is no reason in love and that, seemingly so shared and unselfish, it is really a subjective and selfish business that takes little count of its object, as that object is, but measures everything by what it thinks that object to be.

The green roadster roared up the steep hill from Lower Cove into the uptown section, down the long sharp grade to the Great Marsh Road and out into the quiet farmlands and the woods beyond. There was an excess of energy in Denise that speed of passage alone would enable her to be rid of. She drove fast, seeing little of the rural beauties that lay about her. The hills there roll gently down to the sea and the trees that clothe them densely seem to have been there from all time. This vast land of ours has a wildness and ruggedness of scenery that the clearing and tilling of many parts of it have only slightly impaired. It is yet an untamed thing, a defiant power that stands strong against our pigmy efforts to turn it into hedge-bordered fields, parks and toy-like townships.

And its worthwhile people partake of its spirit. Its children of a generation have a freedom of thought and action that comes from looking

upon wide-flung vistas. They cling not to tradition, those into whom the breath of the land is breathed. Their fathers' ways are not their ways, be their fathers' ways not good. A few generations back, in the Old Country, a daughter of the Rayes would forever have washed her hands clean of a man who looked at a scarlet woman. Not so Denise. She did not shudder, did not act blindly. She looked calmly at the matter and gave it real thought. Yet the blood was hot within her, the woman of her awake. She would fight for her man. Graham Starr had never made her pulses move faster. She had steeled herself against the softness of her kind; she would melt towards no man, she had often told herself. But that was just a pose. After all, she was a woman and man her chief concern.

The car sped on, hurtling over the earth road towards Golden Grove, its steel thews quivering, vibrating beneath the small white hands that clutched the polished wood of the wheel. Faster, faster. It seemed to Denise that Esther Pym walked in the road ahead and if she could catch up with Esther and run over her, all would be well, her problems solved, her spirit at rest. So she pursued that wraith of Esther Pym, striving terribly to reach it. But Esther kept constantly some ten feet ahead and sometimes looked over her shoulder and smiled as who should say, "Your chase is in vain, you can't catch me for I travel on the wings of passion and it flies faster than you who have no passion but ride in a steel charger and think thus to outdistance Eros."

With a reckless laugh that had an ancient echo in the laugh of the Celtic warrior riding in his scythe-bladed chariot into the thick of battle; with a toss of her pale-gold mane from which she had long since pulled the white hat, Denise drove down on the phantom. Ah, there!—she reached it, struck it, passed—over it!—No, when she looked back the wraith of Esther Pym still walked serenely in the highroad and smiled as Mona Lisa would smile.

The green car swerved. Denise jammed on the brakes, but it was too late. It left the road, it climbed a bank, lifted, and she was thrown out upon the sward where she lay, eyes closed, her face towards the bright sky, her little body sprawled grotesquely among the brake and star-asters and touch-me-nots that grew there.

The engine of the roadster hummed away and a bee went singing by the young girl's ear, wondering if this were some new flower, if nectar were at those ruddy lips parted over teeth white as a swan's breast.

After a few minutes her eyes opened. She was not hurt, just jolted a bit. There was no need for the expression of concern in the eyes of the man who

stood above her. He looked like a youthful doctor at the crisis of his first pneumonia-case. He was good-looking, big, with a bronzed ruddy face that the salt winds had beaten and the cold rains washed, purging it of weakness, of any ugliness.

Denise sat up, passed her fingers through her hair, pulled her short skirt over her knees and said,

"Anything smashed?"

"Since you seem to be all right, nothing," he answered. "Your car tangled its nose among the shrubs. You can get it out all right. May I help you—?"

She was on her feet before he could offer aid. She rubbed her elbow ruefully.

"That's what comes of chasing phantoms," she remarked, mostly to herself. She glanced at him again. He wore grey tweeds, a jaunty felt hat, and a yellow walking-stick was in his hand. She rather liked him.

"Did I give you a start?" she asked.

"Yes; not so much when your car climbed the bank as when I came close and saw you lying there. I felt very helpless. You looked so fragile that I feared to use first aid."

"Oh, I don't break easily," she said, laughing at his gravity. He was a most unusual young man. His shoes were dusty, as if he had walked far; and he looked so directly at her. This, though Denise Raye did not know it, was Varick. And this, though Varick did not know it, was the good woman of whom Starr had spoken to him. Thus they were met and in Varick's stout heart an emotion thought dead awakened and shook itself from its long slumber and blinked bright eyes.

Denise was in no hurry to rescue her car and be away. She walked among the bushes and shut off the engine; then she came back and sat down on a fallen trunk of birch, looking up at him.

"I'll be all right shortly," she announced. "But I don't feel like taking to my chariot right now."

"I was about to eat my lunch over there under that beech tree. If you'd care to—"

"I'm famished," said Denise frankly. "Would you think me bold."

"I would not. My name is—"

"Ivy," said she with a wide smile. "I see the initials on that note-book peeping from your pocket. I. V. So to me you're Ivy. Knowing names knocks half the fun out of a meeting like this. I'm content that you're a gentleman and no doubt a scholar, or you wouldn't carry such a big note-book."

"I might be a collector for an instalment-house," grinned Varick. "You have an elfin way about you and the name of Ivy is a happy thought. But can I make something of your initials? I agree with you about names; they don't mean much and often tend to make fine things, like this rural rencontre, prosaic."

"Can you make something of D. R.?"

"D. R.—Deear—Why, yes I could—" He flushed and smiled whimsically.

"Dear?" she suggested archly and they laughed in concert.

"I won't use it much," he said, "but to me you'll be Dear."

His speech finished gravely enough. Love is a lawless sprite. Varick saw the beauty of her, saw it in a fine pure way, almost as Walter Pater saw the beauties of things, spiritually, detached, reverently. Yet her lips were warm and her slimness was ethereal while her lissome movements, as they walked to the grassy spot beneath the beech tree, thrilled him. He had long been out of contact with women, long he had been wary of them, on his guard against them. He had substituted other interests in his life to take their place. But Denise disarmed him and he seized the Epicurean moment to live it, to be happy in it, happier than he had been for a long time.

They ate ham-sandwiches, not by any means unromantic things, and square cakes that crumbled deliciously, and drank clear water from a nearby spring. And they talked, Denise admiringly, Varick disgustedly, of Thoreau —of who else among the woods and streams? Wordsworth came and was dismissed.

Varick was delighted with her. A rare woman this, since she preferred to talk of books and men rather than of parties and trivialities.

"But I don't like Thoreau," he said, almost as dogmatically as Starr would have said it. "I like to tramp the woodlands like he did, but unlike him I want its beauties to remain a mystery to me. I couldn't count the rings in trees, or the feet of a centipede, or pin long names on such little things as gnats. That's making business of pleasure."

"But he did that, examined closely, to enable him to draw conclusions."

"I hate drawing conclusions, Dear," said Varick gravely. "They're dangerous. If, f'r instance, some conclusion-drawer should happen hither just now, someone who knew you and me; hearing us discuss Thoreau while you call me Ivy and I call you Dear, where a half-hour ago we were strangers, he'd call us both crazy. It's dangerous business and very uncertain. I try to avoid conclusions unless they're forced upon me. Certainly I refuse to draw them, however plausible seem the premises."

"That sounds all right." Denise juxtaposed her own problem that he might cast his light upon it. "But in the realm of love, if a woman turned from you to another man would you not conclude—?"

Varick looked at her. His eyes widened. He frowned.

"You win," he said. "The man isn't made that doesn't conclude in such a case that the woman doesn't love him, but loves the other chap. Still, it's forced on you there, painfully."

"You have experienced that?"

"*Semper femina*," he said, shaking his head, its tangled thatch like a little boy's. "Yes, I might say I have. An idyllic affair that ended in dark melancholy. I'm probably over it. But one doesn't forget a woman if she ever mattered much to him, if he wove dreams around her, especially if there's never been another to offset her."

"I can see it's been that way with you." She felt strangely intimate with him. The girl, whoever she was, must have been an awful fool. Queer that decent, honest chaps like this should be the kind to get their figurative faces slapped.

"Anyway," pursued Varick, "I've come to know that love resents laws and conventions. It's an unruly passion. Only loyal souls love well; only loyalty holds many married folk together, loyalty to each other, their children and their God. I don't for a moment think that any one man is destined for a particular woman any more than I believe that any man could mate with any woman. Just why a man should pick one woman out of a hundred possibles is a fascinating problem to me. Still more fascinating is the fact that once he's had her for wife he wants more. That's why I think the Turks with their many wives are a lot more honest about love than we circumspect monogamists."

"Then you do not believe in love eternal and undying!"

"Not outside of books and in a few rare, rare instances in life. I do believe that there is loyalty eternal and undying, that after passion has ceased to be a roaring flame and has smouldered and even died the man and woman can find enough outside of it to hold them together. Looked at that way, matrimony is a reasonable institution. Those who haven't considered it as an institution and looked on love as a business as well as a pleasure are the ones who weep over love and sneak out of matrimony."

"Your philosophy of love is not novel, Ivy," said Denise. "And it's very good. But the idea of a man philosophizing about the grand passion— It's bloodless, it's inhuman. Would you be a Thoreau of *philosophia amoris*!"

"I've been forced to be."

"Why not treat love as you treat nature. You don't inquire into the trees, flowers and insects. You seek to keep their veil of mystery about them, lest when you know them with their clothes off you don't like them. I think it's best—I'm beginning to think it's best to take love the same way. Don't learn from experience, preserve those illusions of pubescence and believe everything a man says to you even while you know he's telling you the worst whoppers."

"That's as it is," quoth Varick. "That's why love brings tears so often: men say what they don't really mean, promise in the heat of passion what they can never fulfill; while women listen to the impossible and force themselves to believe it. But I am too much of a theorizer."

He glanced up at her. She sat on a higher elevation of the sod that covered the beech-roots. Her profile was turned away from him, so that he could see the piquant tilt of her nose and the firm small curve of her chin. Longing, remote, new, poignant, was in Varick's heart. So pure, so sweet she seemed. About her that magic of fair women, that ancient charm that clouds men's eyes.

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head?

So thought Varick, and because he worshipped Wisdom as his goddess he told himself it was "engendered in the eyes with gazing fed." But his heart was vibrant to the beauty of her; the blue of her eyes, the gold sheen of her hair, the creamy white of her throat—Varick found himself mooning over her like a love-sick young man. Why, oxen have beautiful eyes and the golden corn is a rich gold and the milk fresh from the cow's udders is white. "And this love is a malady," thought Varick. "And I must not love this girl. She may be a man's wife or intended for all I know. She would be offended

if she thought I had been so simple as to fall in love with her in the brief while I've been with her. I'm not going to have my philosophical life of Reilly broken up and disquieted by a pair of limbs cased in white silk, a slim round waist and a tempting pair of lips."

But gladly he accepted the invitation to ride with her into the city. The car was drawn from the brambly meshes and the alders that had trapped it. Smoothly it ran and the road was clear. Varick, lover of men's company, found himself enjoying this girl, gladly living each moment with her, finding the green woods along the road more lovely; more flawless the wide blue sky above. Reluctant he was when the time came to leave her, but as they crossed the aboideau over the Marsh Creek he told her he would leave her now. They entered the Haymarket.

"With no word of future meeting?" she asked teasingly.

"On the lap of the gods," said Varick gaily. "So let it be. If it is that we see each other no more, I leave you with the feeling that I am better for having known you. Rare and beautiful are the hours when man and woman are just two spirits, you see; not a man and a woman."

He bade her goodby and strode across the Haymarket. But he had lied. To him they had not been two spirits sans sex. Oh, no, she had been woman, woman, ever mysterious, ever fascinating, ever lovely and subversive of man's peace. And Varick sang his song as he climbed towards Mount Pleasant from the eastern side. He did not know her name or anything about her. Perhaps it was better so: it was sweet to dream.

Back in his big study with its sloping roof and gable windows the quiet afternoon seemed long, yet its hours were pleasantly tinged with reminiscences of her—the tilt of her saucy head, the firmness of her little mouth, the graceful slimness of her and the fine camaraderie she had so quickly shown him.

It was a novelty for Varick to meet a girl like her. Girls made talk, usually, like cream-puffs, light, sweet, unsatisfying. They shunned real thoughts and played along on the surface of life, skimming it like birds the waters of a lake, never dipping into it lest they get wet. She had been so different. And when a man begins to think a woman is different from her sisters he's on the down grade or the up, according as she is fickle and no good, or really fine and by him attainable. Varick was smitten. He who had proclaimed the fundamental sameness of all women was finding a paragon. He who had preached the illusory nature of love was experiencing its strange powers and thinking of a woman. Men are made like that.

But Denise gave little thought to their encounter. When she met Starr that night and walked the bridge with him she did not mention it, because she had forgotten it in the light of matters more important to her. Certainly she felt no growing pains of love. She had found Varick interesting, out of the ordinary, pleasant, attractive. But he was not Graham Starr, and if any man concerned her at all it was Graham Starr. She had been with him more than with any other. She had shared her thoughts with him, if not her emotions. Now that another woman had come between them her possessive instinct was awakened. She could not take his friendship while Esther Pym took his love.

It came sickeningly home to her after the ferry had carried them across the star-dappled waters of the harbour that Starr did not love her. And standing there in the cool gloom of the after-deck she felt suddenly alone and afraid and, oh, very much like a little girl whose friends have drawn off and started a new game in which she could not take part.

He stood at the rail by her side, hands plunged deep in the pockets of his coat. They watched the steady blink, blink of the buoys and the regular flash from the lighthouse on the island as the great beam circled about. The waters gurgled against the keel, the wind was live with brine. And there seemed to be no such thing as love in all the world. Did it matter so much after all, whether this man should be hers or be another's? Why not let him go, if he wished to go? But she looked up at him and her heart said no. She wanted to snuggle close to him and have him say some silly, pretty thing to her. But his eyes gazed afar off and he was not thinking of her, and he would have been amazed if she had touched his arm lovingly. One didn't look for softness in Denise Raye. He supposed she had no illusions. He had come to believe that feminism, as practiced by her, was a real and workable doctrine. Besides, he really was thinking of Esther Pym.

Hate came into Denise Raye, then, and possessed her; not the hate of him, that some girls, most girls would feel, but hate for the woman whom he loved, the interloper, the stronger person than she. Yes, joyously would she have struck Esther Pym down into the dust and let the great wheels pass over her sinful body, crushing it, marring it, so that it would be ugly in the sight of men who had coveted it. She would ride Esther down—but when she looked back would there be a broken thing lying in the road or would Esther still walk there and smile pityingly at her?

CHAPTER V

There are two cannons on the Common: one a relic of the days of French occupation, the other a souvenir of the recent war. Children straddle them, play at bombardment of ships in the harbour and engage in sundry games of battle. Pat and Diarmid, this September morning, had just come from a play of squinting down the long barrels and saying "boom" to indicate the explosion.

They stood by the Grassman who, glad of a respite, leaned on the rake with which he had been gathering up yellow leaves, and acceded to their request to tell them a story. The Grassman had a mythology of his own and at will could draw from it material for many astounding and forceful tales.

"This happened in Ireland," said the Grassman, his cheek swelled out with tobacco. "An' it's a true story. It's about goints."

"Joints?" questioned Diarmid. "There's a joint on Wadham Street, I heard Nora say. Did they have joints in Ireland?"

"Of course," said the Grassman. "The biggest goints in the world was in Ireland and this one was more'n twelve foot tall an' was the greatest wrassler in the County Cavan."

"Oh, he means giants," explained Pat.

"Goints," insisted the Grassman. "This one I'm speakin' of was called—was called Finn—"

"But that was the name of the hurldunty in the last story you told us. Remember, about the smallest man in the County Kerry?"

"The hurldunty? Makes no odds. There was more Finns than one an' it's possible Finn the hurldunty was called from Finn the goint, because Finn the goint lived before him an' was many ways a more famous man. Everybody in Ireland knew this Finn; he was the champeen wrassler."

"What about him?" Pat's blue eyes were widely curious.

The Grassman gazed afar off as though to summon his characters from the veiled places of ancient times. He rubbed his thigh and made a few motions with the rake.

"Finn was the best wrassler in Ireland an' this big Englishman heard about him an' decided to come over an' wrassle him for the champeenship of the world."

"What was the Englishman's name?" Diarmid was a stickler for details.

"Eh—? Oh, Dawson was his name," said the Grassman not very convincingly. "Dawson makes up his mind to come over an' take Finn on for a go. So he gets on the train and crosses to Ireland."

"He couldn't," objected Pat. "It's an island, a body of land entirely surrounded by water. He'd have to take the boat."

"I'm tellin' this story," said the Grassman with dignity. "There was a bridge them times, thousands of years ago."

"Then there wouldn't be any trains," said Diarmid.

"As I was sayin', Dawson comes over to Ireland to wrassle Finn. A pretty cocky fellow was Dawson an' very sure of himself. Says he, 'Finn will be pie for me. I'll break him in halves.' Dawson was a mighty man, but nothing a-tall as big as Finn. He didn't know what he was up against. He'd heard Finn was a goint, but didn't believe it; not much.

"When he got to Finn's place he walks in an' says to Mrs. Finn, 'I've come from England to wrassle Finn.'"

"'Have ye?' says she. 'Well, come in an' sit down; we're just havin' supper an' you might like some.'

"Mrs. Finn led the way into the kitchen an' Dawson followed her an' sat down. He looks around him an' there sittin' in the corner is a big goint."

The Grassman paused for effect. "A big goint," he repeated.

"Was that Finn?" asked Pat.

"Dawson never see'd such a man; twelve foot tall an' shoulders wider 'n a door. The goint was sleepin' an' Dawson didn't like to wake him up for fear he'd be mad. In the meantime, Mrs. Finn is cookin' pancakes on a big iron griddle an inch thick. She happens to leave the room for a minute an' the goint wakes up.

"'Gosh, I'm hungry,' says he, not noticin' Dawson. 'What's that I smell —pancakes?' Then he jumps up an' bein' kind of sleepy still, picks up the pan an' all and bites it half in two, right through the iron. 'Um! That tastes good,' says he. Then seein' Dawson, he growls,

" 'Hullo, where'd you come from?'

" 'Oh, nowheres,' says Dawson, nervous-like. 'I heard there was a great wrassler an' goint named Finn lived here an' I wanted to see him.'

" 'Papa'll be in very soon now,' says the goint.

" 'Begosh,' hollers Dawson. 'I won't wait,' an' he beat it back to England. Now whadda ye think o' that?"

"It's a lot of boloney," said Pat.

Diarmid had turned away to salute a little dark-eyed boy who came shyly up to them.

"Hello, stinkaboo," said Diarmid. "You missed the fairy tale. Tell it again," he commanded the Grassman. But Pat's criticism had hurt. And,

"I won't—not me," announced the Grassman, beginning to rake. "You didn't appreciate that one."

"Wasn't so good as you usually tell," consoled Diarmid. "Here's Wafer."

Graham Starr walked over the grass towards them, waving a hand in answer to the Grassman's greeting.

"Hello, Pat. Hello, Diarmid." He looked curiously at Eric Pym and saw Esther in the boy's black eyes.

"Hello," he said to Eric.

"Hello, Mr. Starr."

"Call him Wafer," said Diarmid. "He won't answer to Mr. Starr."

"That's what mother calls him. And she reads his books and watches him from the window when he's talking to Denise on your step."

Starr looked amazed, uncomfortable; so, too, did Esther Pym who, searching for Eric, had come upon them unawares. She flushed and Starr after looking at her for a few seconds, walked off with Pat and Diarmid. Sometimes the speedy granting of a desire or the rapid progress of love unnerves us, we are slow to adjust ourselves to it. So it was with Starr. "But this is an unholy thing," he said to himself. "I can't go on with it. I dare not fly in the face of the world and be seen with her. Could I possibly gain more than I lose and could one woman's love make up for the censure that would be heaped upon me? It would surely crush me."

Then was born in him an unworthy resolve. Desire had weakened him, sapped his strength and made him entertain thoughts that before had no

place in his mind. Desire is like that; like a drop of tea on a spoonful of sugar in its spreading. It makes only a brown spot, but that grows larger and larger; so lust in the white of the soul. He desired her; it was a desire not difficult of attainment. But he felt shame—such as he had not felt when he confessed he loved her—to think that he must be as many men in the pursuit of venery and would grovel like they among the husks of swine that his passion might be sated.

He comforted himself with saying it was a human and natural longing he felt for her. But Pat's hand, nestling in his, reproached him and he freed his and would have said to her, "Unclean, unclean."

For one did not love Esther Pym as one loved other women. There could be no thought of fresh, sweet wooing, of love's pure first kiss, of engagement and a bridal of white silk and lace, of orange blossoms and showered confetti. Men did not take the Esther Pyms of the world before the high altar, place a ring on their finger, a chaste kiss upon their lips and speak assent to the words that bind for life. Love for her would go along a hidden way, a way forbidden, yet which he might take as others took it. And would his love be any less worthwhile, any less satisfying than if it received the sanction of Church and State? Would Esther Pym be less his bride or lie less warmly in his arms?

He glanced over his shoulder. She walked down the path behind them, her hand in Eric's. The keen autumn wind whipped her skirts about her and proclaimed her beauty. The boy, with a boy's candour, had told him that she looked at him and liked him. Then why not? Because society said no? Because the little people would sneer and say all manner of things unkind—if they knew? They need not know. His dealings with Esther could be kept secret. He had none to spy upon him and no one could look into his soul and see its darkness. Even Denise need not know. She must not.

Now that this obsession had seized upon him he found that it was Denise of whom he was thinking, Denise who was in his life the symbol of all that is pure and good, noble and not of earth. Could he look in her eyes after—after he had looked into Esther Pym's with the glare of lust? Could he bear to touch her, even the hem of her dress, when his hands were—unclean?

The little boy and girl who walked with him broke into his musings with a weird chant, delivered in that taunting, irritating voice that youngsters naturally cultivate. The chant was directed at a boy on the other side of Wadham Street, a skinny boy who wore glasses and seemed much too tall for his age. The chant was this,

"He's going down to Uncle Gil's to get some fish for Goldie."

The words going, uncle, get and Goldie received the stress and the line was repeated many times.

The skinny boy's face grew red. He carried a basket on his arm, perhaps to contain the fish.

"Red-heads!" he yelled. "Bricktops!"

Then he ran, with the Rayes in hot pursuit and Starr saw them vanish, pursuers and pursued, down Sydney Street to Britain, where the fish-houses are.

It was Friday, near the end of the long summer-holidays, and already the shadow of school had fallen upon the youngsters. Thoughts of geography, arithmetic and spelling stole in upon their play and sickness began to come to their little stomachs at the threat of the long hours of incarceration ahead.

Graham Starr, much of a boy himself, thought of school and indulged in a few regrets that his own life was not ordered and mapped out for him like Diarmid's or Pat's. It struck him as odd that parental love and the State's safeguards will do so much to shield one for a part of life from every hardship and danger; then turn one loose at the end to face all winds that blow. But then, some men are coddled and protected all their lives by women; others coddle themselves by means of a religion or a steady safe policy that insures a fair comfort, and others are just too stupid to let life bother them at all.

Here was he, wrestling for weeks with a silly problem, now praying for a monastic strength that would steel him against the assaults of love; now ready to yield and wondering why he should trouble to resist and not want to go where his inclination led. He did not believe that his love was made ignoble because its object was to the world ignoble. Was there any difference between the love a man felt for a woman above reproach and for one to whom reproaches did not matter? He felt not: the object did not determine the nature of the love. And what love is good and what bad, if it is really love?

He searched for a distinction and could find none save that which Varick had made between the love which is pure passion and naught beyond and that in which companionship and mutual understanding, commonality of interest and sportsmanship play a greater part than short-lived desire. But a man who had not lived both kinds of love, as Varick named them, could fully understand neither. And Graham Starr was drawn only one way, to this

woman who, like a lodestone, made his thoughts swing towards her and tinged his life with some insatiable, indefinable hunger.

His problem was old, his doubt old, his passion old. Men have lived that problem from the beginning, but each man finds his own answer, finds happiness or misery, ecstasy or agony; finds the solution to his difficulties in his own way or goes baffled and defeated to the end.

He called at the Rayes', but Denise was not there. He had seen her only once, for a few moments, during the week that had gone by since they walked the bridge. He knew she was avoiding him and he could understand her reasons. They had been so much together that people had taken a lot for granted. It is the way of small places—let a man be seen once or twice with a woman, and he is said to be "going with" her. Denise would suffer much criticism if it were known that he had turned to Esther Pym. No doubt, she was angry with him, and disgusted. He felt ashamed, at a loss, when he left the Rayes' and walked away; rapidly, for Esther Pym was up there at her window and her eyes were upon him.

He went home. His work was neglected. He felt an actual repugnance for writing. The efforts he made seemed slow and laboured, the results drab and lacking in any fire, any show of life. A great restlessness was upon him and there seemed to be nothing solid to which he could anchor. All he had was a shifting, treacherous emotion that in his heart he did not trust, that attracted and held him, yet in the end might fool him and leave him worse off than before. He was disorganized, demoralized and in that state of desperation and discontent that can make a man do almost anything. Esther had caused this, or was it woman?

He sought Varick, but the big fellow's door was locked and no answer came. Ethel, the woman who "did" for them and prepared their meals, told him that Varick had gone off early in the day and said he would not be back for lunch. Starr ate alone. Even his food, which usually he relished, was distasteful to him now and to Ethel's chagrin he left the steak untasted.

It was the opening day of the Exhibition. No doubt Varick had gone there. Ordinarily, Varick did not go places. He never went to theatres, and only on rare occasions did he walk the streets of the city, except late at night or in the early morning. He shunned them, not for fear of hurt, of unpleasant contact; but only because he did not care for them and found them rather annoying. He would, however, go to the Exhibition. Yes, without doubt, he would be there. Varick loved dogs, poultry, cattle and all the fruits of the

field. One would find him at the Exhibition; so there, for want of a better place to go, Graham Starr betook himself.

Banners blew in the breeze, hundreds of gay streamers and pennons fluttered from the spires and cupolas of the fair-buildings at the extreme south end of the city, which, from time immemorial has been called Lower Cove. And thousands of people went there to wander through the great buildings and admire the displays of furniture, confectionery, stoves, china, silverware, automobiles, washing-machines and every conceivable product of industry; to drift along the pike and waste their dimes on games where you just can't win, to spend hours in trying to gain a pair of blankets that could be bought for less than the money risked on chance of getting them; to eat the ubiquitous hot-dog, greet old friends, get tired, dusty and very much bored. Starr hated it—bourgeois, simple-minded, moronic. But it filled the lives of many for at least a little while and helped them in their business of avoiding the arduous work of thinking for themselves.

There were roundabouts, ferris-wheels, strange contraptions where one climbed into a sort of tub and was churned about and shaken into a jelly and left breathless for ten cents. There were Wild West Shows where ferocious cowboys and sad-eyed Indians stood like images on a platform in front of a canvas drop showing Custer's Massacre in the middle, a charging bison on one side and an animal that looked like a jackass on the other. There was a hula-hula, done by a two-hundred-pound diva in a sea-grass skirt and shark-tooth necklace, who looked as though a bath would cause her duskiness to pale; a motordrome whence came spasmodic whirrings and thrummings and wild cheering; a wrestling and boxing tent where a pug-nosed tough with nondescript ears held up fifty dollars and invited all comers to take it from him by the knockout method. Everywhere was noise—the strident tones of barkers, the laughter and chaff of the midway, the howling of bewildered and over-stuffed children, the blare of calliopes and brass-bands.

Starr hastened from the cacophony and climbed the stairs to the comparative quiet of the dog-show. Comparative quiet; for the baying of big dogs and the sharp yapping of toys and Sealyhams was music to him. Long rows of boxes, wired in front, were set up on benches and there were displayed dogs of every conceivable variety, some lying down and looking indescribably wearied with the whole proceedings, others up on their haunches and waxing vocal in competition with noisy neighbours. Tin plates were littered about and chains hung on the wall and ads for dog-biscuit, vermifuge, mange remedy and other doggy perquisites, were tacked upon the white-washed posts.

Hugo Ferrer sat there with Varick, both on soap-boxes, surrounded by four collies and a tall gaunt woman with yellow parchment face, beady green-black eyes and a prehistoric bonnet. Two of her incisors were gone and as she talked she showered and one could see the shower entering among the motes in the fat sunbeams that streamed in by the west window.

Starr came to them, but did not interrupt the frank conversation about bitches, whelping, breeding, weaning, that was engaged in with no embarrassment whatever, while Varick sat silently by, smoking his pipe, and looking very much edified by the grand amount of knowledge that Hugo and the Dogwoman displayed. Roderick Dhu was stretched out at Hugo's feet, watching the other collies with indifferent mien. They were young and this woman owned them; Roderick Dhu was old and belonged to the musician, Hugo Ferrer, and walked many miles each day with him down the silent woodland paths and heard him discourse of souls, flowers, trees, Cremonas, scherzos and free-verse. Thus Roderick Dhu was a dog among dogs, and knew it.

Starr took a seat on a bench close to Varick, who wore grey knickers and heather stockings and looked very brown and wholesome and happy. And again Starr envied him. Varick took life so serenely and evenly. Starr had never seen him ruffled. Now he smoked placidly and watched the curling wreaths of blue vapour while listening to Hugo and the Dogwoman, who also owned a Russian wolfhound of much value, Airedales and Pekes. She was a great authority.

"Good show," remarked Varick.

"Rather," agreed Starr, watching the Dogwoman with fascinated regard.

"Coalies is restless devils," spat the Dogwoman. "So is Ardales. I've lots of trouble with them. But you got to keep 'em well wormed. Then I burn bones and pound the bones into powder and mix it with their mash. That makes 'em big and husky. I don't buy expensive worm-capsules. There's brown powder you can get for ten cents is just as good."

"You can't beat the collie-bitch for looks," remarked Hugo, stroking a sweet-faced female that came and nuzzled his hand. "I love this one."

The Dogwoman smiled pleasedly; the bitch was her favourite. "That's Bess," she said. "Nice girl!"

Varick and Starr got up and strolled down the long lines of improvised kennels, pausing here and there to comfort an unhappy spaniel, to make faces at an impudent Chow. They stopped at a window and looked out upon

the grounds, upon the midway and the great field in the centre where cattle and sheep were being judged and great black bulls were being led about.

Varick gazed intently at the fence that bordered the enclosure. Starr glanced at him and saw unusual interest in his face, a boyish eagerness and pleasure, as of one who had sought to see a certain person and at last had found her. He followed Varick's gaze. He frowned. Denise Raye stood there by the fence with Nora and Doris Glyn. Denise looked chic and cool in her white coat and hat. But why did Varick look so at her? He did not know Denise. Starr found himself resenting Varick's interest in her. He had known Denise since she wore pinafores, from the time her hair hung in a profusion of golden-red curls down her gingham-clad back and when, like Pat and Diarmid, she used madly to pursue those who dared call "Red-head" after her.

"Silly," muttered Varick.

"You were saying—?"

Varick smiled, but did not take his eyes away from Denise. Her face was turned to them now as she laid down the law to Nora, gesturing prettily with white gloved hands.

"I was thinking," answered Varick, "that gold and ivory white make a pure combination of colour and that a man who has been once badly bitten or who has made a hash of falling in love has no business to go and run the risk of the same thing all over again."

"Surely you have not—?"

"A man, theoretically, does not talk of his love-life; in reality he does. It will out. It's too big for him to keep all to himself. I've been in love since last Saturday, with that girl in white—seriously affected by her and I suppose she's forgotten my existence."

"Denise Raye," said Starr. "I didn't know you had met her. She is the finest girl in the world."

"Oh!" said Varick turning to him. "You know her well enough to say that? You spoke to me one night of your own problems. Is she—the saint you mentioned, the paragon?"

Starr nodded.

"She's four-square to the world, Varick. I don't wonder that you are smitten with her. Has this gone very far?"

"Not on the surface, but I've been taken with the disease just as seriously as if I were a schoolboy. I met her quite by accident last Saturday. I talked with her. We didn't exchange names. But it was the most delightful experience I've had in many moons. She is so human."

Starr did not assent to that. Denise had always seemed a little more than human to him, a stranger to human emotions, a girl about whom a man could no more think of amorously than if she were a celestial madonna, a girl in whom passion was strongly leashed. He had not tried to win Denise; it seemed sacrilegious to talk of such a pitiful thing as love to her. She would not treat of it with her heart; only with her head. And they never got far. She had made no mention of Varick. Probably she had forgotten him, while he was thinking so much of her.

"If I love her," questioned Varick, "do I encroach upon your preserves?"

"I think not," said Starr, feeling as if something strong and right were being swept away from him. "My love lies elsewhere. Anyway, Denise Raye does not love me. We have been friends, good friends, since childhood. No more than that."

Varick looked happy to hear it. Starr reflected. Yes, Varick and Denise would be an ideal pair. Varick had all that he had and much more. Varick had travelled more widely than he; Varick's was a broader culture. And in Varick was no queer twist that would make a woman like Esther Pym seem the most desirable in the world of women.

"Would you care to meet Denise—formally?" asked Starr, with little enthusiasm. He did not relish the idea of being the one to introduce to her the man who would take her away from him. Away from him? What a strange thought! She was not his. He did not value her nor try to show himself worthy of her. He had vaunted before her eyes that another woman, and she one of the socially ostracized, had claimed his attention. Even if her liking for him was only friendly, he must have hurt her. Yet she was broadly tolerant, understanding, unprejudiced. With him she had gone to prayer-meeting and Sunday-school in their youth, but it had made of her no prude as it had made of him no puritan.

"Oh, no," said Varick. "Nothing so prosaic. Love looks out for its devotees and I would rather leave our future meetings to chance. I like to believe in predestination, though I know it's a myth. But a lot of the joy of love comes from chance-meetings. Have you never approached a street-corner thinking that when you turned it, you'd come face-to-face with her you loved? Have you never dreamed what you'd do, how you'd act; coldly

or with a melting smile? Haven't you cooked up all sorts of romantic encounters, like carrying her from a burning building, pushing her in the tide and fishing her out again, rescuing her from a horde of criminal ruffians who wanted to dissect her and pack her in trunks? Yes, you have."

"More or less," agreed Starr, convinced now that Varick only played at love. "You don't take this passion seriously."

"I try not to—on the surface. I am wary of it. There is more than a possibility that she may not see that which she'd like in me and 'if she be not kind to me—' Love is the last venture into which one should dive headlong, yet perverse man goes blindly about it without consulting such valuable tomes as Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy.' Yes; and even those who have absorbed the sage Robert's counsels go just as precipitately about the business."

"'Tis the nature of the baste," said Starr ruefully. "We barter everything for a single draught that our passion craves. I wish I were Hugo Ferrer and loved a dog to the exclusion of the rest of creation. Yet love doesn't always disappoint."

"Not quite always," cynically agreed Varick. "And even marriages have been known to be happy. However, it's a dismal stricture that a man has to love the woman he marries—I mean with a heroic love. And it's not taught in the schools nor proclaimed from the pulpits nor advertized on the hoardings that love, so-called, is a short lived business and its sure cure is to let the lovers love to their hearts' content. After that, marriage is marriage and narrows down or broadens out or what you will, to a process of fine adjustment of personalities, habits, temperaments, love of onions or dislike of same and a lot of very commonplace things that when Youth was murmuring 'I love you' into the ear of Youth, were never at all thought of."

"This," said Starr, "is a hell of a discussion in a dog-show. It's like telling jokes in church or singing hymns in a boiler-factory."

Esther Pym had come to hate the life she lead. Once in a survey of the sad sisterhood it was told that full many were thereof because they loved it and found in a variety of swains such delectation as the ordinary, respectable routine of life could not afford. It was a lie. An they be not beasts, which no women are, it cannot be otherwise than that a time should come wherein they would call down curses upon themselves, on the parents that begot them, on the inscrutable God and at the same time ask His mercy.

So, when Esther came to the fair that day the desire for sin and its profits was not in her and she longed to be as other women; chaste maidens or honest wives. But Thaïs was Thaïs and wherever she walked men knew her and looked upon her and gloated with their eyes. She hated them, for in the weed-grown place, where was her heart, a small white flower, a rose, a poppy, had taken miraculous root and bloomed now strongly, though its nurture was far less than hope.

She had gone down the road which there was no retracing—far down. Could she be transplanted a thousand miles hence; given an honest means of making a livelihood and honest friends to know—she would have been as before, a woman living in sin; for it was only the love of a man that made Esther despise all men and were she far away from the object of her love she would fall again into the easy ways of life.

Esther had wept that morning after she had seen Starr on the Common and heard him speak with her sister's child. She had made a god of him, a god in whom was no carnal thought, who was unique among men, who could not be as others were, "extortioners, adulterers." Because Esther knew no real God it was only natural that she should set one up for herself, since in her as in all of us was that instinct of abasement that seeks exaltation in the worship of something. And what more fitting than that she should deify this man whom she knew only by sight, by fond reading of the words he had written, by long dreaming in the room where the boy played? Thus, she made an idol of one of God's creatures, an earthly thing, and adored him and deluded herself that he was not as the rest of men.

And this adoration—for it was more than love and sought no base fulfillment, indeed would have failed and died at the thought of carnal fulfillment—made her better and opened her eyes to a clean, bright world where the song of birds and the rush of the sea wind in the trees drowned out the word of shame and the wanton laugh; where waters that had flowed muddily grew clear and skies that were overcast became cloudless. Life mocks at people who make such ideals, life has a surly, puckish trick of shoving us back in our groove with a stinging slap and unvocal reprimand for our temerity in ever daring to defy its dictates or fight clear of the gyves it has put upon us.

In the midway Esther met Denise Raye face-to-face and the saint's eyes were bold and spoke venom, while the sinner's eyes were downcast and confessed unworthiness. The saint wore white and her pale cheeks had the faintest flush of rose and her hair was a bright halo; the sinner wore deep purple and her dark cheeks had guilty roses and her hair was sleek and close

about her head. Innocence was in the soul of one; guilt in the soul of the other. Denise thought of a love that had begun to mean much and was in danger of perishing because of the other; Esther said unto herself, “This is his chosen and because he loves her I love her, for she must be good.” Thus thought one and thus the other; but only two women passed, and the world was the same.

CHAPTER VI

Loved of wise men was the shade of my roof-tree,
The true word of welcome was spoken in the door.

You felt that about Hugo Ferrer's. There are grocery stores, chemists' shops and confectioners, also a butcher and a clothier nearby. Across Pendock Street and farther down from Hugo's house is a church and in the glebe the clergyman lives. On Blont Street, corner of Pendock, is an undertaker's parlour and a doctor's office near it, thus illustrating the old principle of supply and demand.

Says Hugo, "All a man wants is within hail of my window. When I was born, father called Dr. Leith by shouting from the door. When father died, a wave of my hand brought the undertaker. T-bone steak and lettuce, also pills, are broadcast across to the butcher, the grocer and the chemist, while the minister often passes by my window."

Four times each day a thousand children go past Hugo Ferrer's window from the schools on Pendock Street. Their laughter, the hum of their young voices has a sweetly human note coming in on Hugo's discussions of Kant and Hegel, of Nietzsche and Jung. Hugo smiles his smile of a thousand wrinkles, when, in the midst of a speech like this—"The antediluvian doctrine of faculty-psychology is no longer tenable by any but nit-wits," some small boy will shout, his voice coming clear through the open window, "Oh, go wash your neck, cock-eye!"

Hugo rubs his hands then and laughs. Speculation is such a silly business; philosophy the pastime of fools. Boys and teamsters and workmen —they're the merry fellows. They get something real out of life. They enjoy it because they don't bother thinking about it. "I'd like to smoke a pipe," says Hugo, "and not have to see things in the smoke clouds and dwell on thoughts and theories that are quite as vapoury and shifting. Thinking is the blindest of blind-alley occupations." Then, maybe, he'll take his fiddle and tuck it under his chin with a tender movement like with which fond lovers place their sweetheart's head on their shoulder. You won't recognize the tune he plays. If you don't know him very well, you may be silly enough to ask what it is, and he won't answer you, but will put the fiddle down and tell you about old Pepys as if he knew that delightful babbler. Then he'll jump to

Debussy, which is a Herculean jump, too, and maybe recount some stones of John Sebastian Bach or a good joke on Handel.

Hugo's studio is a hearty place. Roderick Dhu prowls about with a proprietary air and shows unmistakably that he's on his own ground, knows you for a mere visitor and will be polite to you, though he has a faint suspicion that you might try to make off with the big square Steinway or the contre-bass that stands in the corner, left of the hearth. In Hugo's room are many books—some queer old ones on violin-making. He has marked-passages in these, which he'll read to you. His glasses will fall off four times to a short page and just when you think they're going to smash on the table, they'll fetch up miraculously at the end of one of those funereal black strings, so much in vogue among college-deans, old doctors and judges.

There are violins and violas, guitars, mandolins, a banjo; "bum instrument," Hugo calls it; a rare old violoncello and a real French horn with a bit of red ribbon on it. Hugo's own deft hands made the big straight-grained oak music-stand; and many violins had he made, of which only one pleased him. Fencing-foils are crossed on the wall above a picture of old Bach. Fencing makes the wrist strong and supple. There is no picture of "The Music Lesson," though that excellent piece of art should be to fiddlers and such, what "The Doctor" is to physicians and surgeons; "The Cotter's Saturday Night" to Burns enthusiasts. Tobacco ash lies everywhere. "It is the symbol of a man's freedom from feminine domination," insists Hugo, "to scatter ashes where he will."

Graham Starr, a little fellow who wore brown corduroy-suits and those awful horse-shoe collars that constricted boys' necks and have since—for God is merciful—died away, used to come for music lessons to Hugo Ferrer. Graham would sweat and tremble and suffer terribly, long before the lesson-time came. Hugo was an ogre then, who would scowl and say, "What key is that written in? Define the major scale, the harmonic-minor? Tune your fiddle. That E's flat. Where are your brains? Did you practise two hours a day as I told you—a quarter-hour before breakfast, a quarter-hour at noon, a half-hour after school, an hour at night? Did you? Well, play that exercise and keep your fingers down, beat time with your foot, count with your lips and listen!"

Starr would play, his fingers stiff and sticky, his soul a-shudder, knowing that he was failing. Hugo would sit behind him with never a word, until the miserable performance was over. Then,

"Just God!" Hugo would say with a note of ineffable sadness in his voice. "You played that through in two sharps instead of three. Your D-string was a half-tone flat. And didn't you—didn't you hear it was out of tune? Don't snivel! You have no ear for music. The violin is the last instrument for you. It's played with the heart and hearing more than with the fingers or brain. Go home now and don't come back till you can play 'Bonny Doon' as it should be played."

Twice each week was that scene of agony enacted. But one day Hugo Ferrer jumped from his chair and shouted,

"Play on! Play ahead, you! Ah—!"

Then he embraced the boy and sat down, laughing in high glee.

"You've done it. You've learned a tune. It's remarkable how it came to you. I never thought you'd be able to hear—anything. You're a dogged little beggar. Now you'll go ahead."

It was the first word of praise Hugo gave him. He advanced. He learned to play well. But for years now he had neglected music to serve with all his soul the more capricious muse of literature.

"For you," said Hugo when he had read Starr's earliest writing, "music is ended. Of course, your violin will be a comfort, a relaxation to you—but no more. What you're doing is a bigger thing, boy. I wish I had your power. Oh, I've tried to write—"

He brought some manuscript from his table-drawer, held it out shyly. And Starr found it was gold—almost too pure a gold for this world's dirty fingers. But only those who knew the writer to love him could fully understand.

"It's great, sir," said Starr.

"Pish!" said Hugo, "I don't care what it is."

Starr came there frequently. But he never stood before the yellow oak of the door in the vestibule without feeling those same sensations that the little boy had known—nervousness, a sickness at the heart, an obsession that he was facing an ordeal. The old attitude of pupil to master persisted with Starr. Not with Hugo. This boy had proven himself. His name was known far and wide. He was acclaimed. He had done much and there lay before him worlds to conquer. Hugo saw in him the power to conquer, the same slow doggedness that had made him plug ahead till he could hear music and play it. Hugo admired that, still more he wondered to see in young Starr some

flashes, frequent, of what could only be called genius. Hugo puzzled his head. It was as if one saw peeping up along a rim of earth, here and there, a vein of virgin metal; but try as one would, the whole course of it would not be unearthed, so rocked over, so clayed in, so convoluted and aborted it was.

Starr, himself, knew. In the breathless hours of the night he worked. He wrote and there came sometimes a thought and he wrote it and when it was done he was afraid. Yes, shiveringly afraid of the thing that had produced that thought.

"That wasn't mine—or was it, really?" he whispered. "What came in me then? I wasn't conscious of what I was writing and, God, it terrifies me!" The room would seem chill then and he'd want to rush out of it and away to where there was life, where people moved and one touched reassuring things like hands and cups and heard words spoken.

Awesome moments like those were the flashes that Hugo saw, but only Starr knew that they were himself, his real self. The rest of him, the most of him, was buried in fear, in wrong teaching, in futility. And all his life, even if he knew how to go about the task of shovelling himself out of the encumbering rock and mire, would not be a time long enough to release him.

We nurture and train flowers, dogs, horses—they're good things and, no doubt, deserve it. But what have children done that instead of nurture they get slow poison; instead of training they get perversion? For the animals and plants the best of reasonable, scientific care, happiness, full exercise of life, even though it is civilized and unnatural to them in many ways; for children—a god with a stick and a devil with a fire to burn them if they don't do this and that. They are harassed by moral halters and religious harness. Early they learn to say, "He doesn't go to our church," and to look on "he" as a person much different, much less favoured and less likely to be saved. That's what ruins a man's life, if he really wants to live, that's what hog-ties him from the start and gives him a handicap that God in His wisdom never intended a human to have.

Starr knew that. He struggled against fear. He hated the moral-halters and the smug precepts of the holy. But he warred against a terrible force—a shadowy, vague, ominous force that seemed to bear upon him with the weight of the ages, while he had only his own mind, and it made sponge-like with the holes of this fear and that, one precept and the other, that had been put there like larvae and had made worms which ate on and inward. Conform—was life just a long conforming to rules and doctrines? One

couldn't conform to all of them. Why must one conform to any? But life is a grim warfare if one doesn't conform and for Graham Starr, who had come from the little people and still was of them, it was a gigantic combat.

Starr came to Hugo Ferrer's one night, the Monday following the dog-show excursion. It was eleven o'clock. Varick was there and Eugene Buller, the man who loathed Debussy, but who, apart from that, said Hugo, was a good fellow. Starr's welcome to that group was a characteristic one. The door had been open, he had walked in, stepped over the dog and entered the studio through green rope portières which looked sturdy enough to hang pirates.

Those present glanced at him, moving slightly in their chairs; save Hugo, who stood on the sheepskin rug in front of the hearth, his back to the flames.

"The idea of preaching a material hell to those youngsters!" growled Hugo, apropos of something Starr did not try to guess. "You're orthodox, Gene," he accused the lanky Buller. "But surely you don't countenance that!"

"I surely do," said Buller. "See here, Hugo—don't you think that fear of fire is a big deterrent from sin? Like fear of the gallows is from committing a murder?"

"If you start to talk about sin I'll prove to you that fear of the gallows never held a sufficiently provoked man from slaying his provoker. What do you mean, sin?"

"Stealing, making a man a monkey by taking his wife, lying—"

"Oh, hang it! I might have known you'd trot out those standbys. But if a sin is serious and dangerous it's bound to be punished here on earth by some law or other. If you lie on paper you can be gaoled, if you're caught with some man's wife you're an adulterer."

"But how many are caught?" said Buller lamely.

Varick roared.

"What a fool debate!" said he. "Give us peace from your thefts, lies, murders and adulteries. It's profitless to discuss all that. It's mid-Victorian, of the Mauve Decade. *Laissez faire* is by far the best policy to adopt towards the conduct of society."

Hugo Ferrer snorted with disdain.

"Anyway," continued Varick, "they don't preach the real nature of hell now."

"They do," said Starr, and his voice was the most earnest of any there. "They still preach it and terrify the simple; some poor folk carry that fear even unto death. Strange to be haunted by a hell all your life and find when you die that you were torturing yourself for nothing. Hell is a poor deterrent, friend Buller. Better a man should sin than be made a good coward. Fear has caused more misery in the world than wars, pestilence and famine. I take in all fears."

"Fine!" Hugo smiled genially. "There speaks the emancipated."

"No, Hugo. No; I'm not emancipated, whatever you may think. I act as if I were, but I can't clear myself of old fears. That's right. For centuries and centuries they've been hammered in, wedged in, thumbscrewed in to human nature. How can a man eradicate all that? When it's still around you—when you're a pariah, openly reviled if you—? The other day a Christian girl married a Jew, 'What a disgrace!' they said. Disgrace, hell! But that's what you're up against. A boy went looking for a miserable job. 'What religion?' asked the prospective employer. 'What religion do you have to be to get the place?' returned the boy. There it is; that's the society we belong to and Varick says *laissez faire*. I won't, I'll fight it!" He swore a bitter oath.

"Gently," counseled Varick pityingly. Starr's distress was so real. He had spiritual convulsions, a baby-ailment of the soul which too-sensitive people get until the sensitiveness which is their soul becomes calloused or atrophied. "You'll fight it, yes," continued Varick. "And it will beat you, even though you're right. You're bull-headed, Starr, very. You'll go your own way. You'll experiment. You'll play the deuce with your own life and the lives of others, you'll put a lot of things down—but that's all. You'll be no farther on the way to truth. That's what you want, I suppose. You're scorching, Hugo."

"Thank you. I hadn't noticed. These Fall nights are chilly and I like to get close to the fire. I like to be warm by the fire with friends like you. It's a relief to be able to talk and be understood or, at least, tolerated. You have prejudices, of course, but they're the right sort. If only Buller weren't so orthodox."

"You need a bit of sanity, you Reds," said Buller. "At least, I hold to something solid and have that consolation. You fellows don't. You bother yourselves with everlasting speculation and Varick admits you get nowhere in the end. It's so much more sensible and comfortable to conform—"

"It depends on how you're constituted," Hugo interrupted. "On how you look at life. I admire Graham's attitude and partake of it, even while I pity it, admitting the truth of what Varick says. But, when all is spoken and the guests are going, the only pioneering left for men to do is in the field of thought, philosophy and science. You, Buller, are like those who decried Columbus and didn't want any voyages of discovery; you're like those who put Galileo in prison. There'll always be men like Columbus and Galileo, and the shell-hardened holdersback won't be able to stop them. The aim of religion is, by setting up a God of Perfection, to enable men to live in society with the maximum of concord. But how can there be concord when religions differ so and war for ages on points of ritual, on the kind of clothes their clergymen should wear and the way one should salute the bishop? They talk about the functions of Church and State being separate. That's a myth. A man's religion, if he is a religious man, is stronger than his patriotism. Why? Because religion implies heaven or hell and patriotism—"

"Quite so," said Varick. "But let us play some music. I listened to all this for six years in three universities—this and worse. Starr has likewise suffered. That it concerns Buller not at all is proven by the fact that he is half asleep. And that a man who plays the viola, as you do, Hugo, should be concerned with the relative powers of religion and patriotism, surpasses my understanding. I suggest the steadying influence of *Pélleas et Mélisande*—"

"No, no," protested Buller, wide-awake.

"Then Mozart."

So they had Mozart, Buller doing quite well at the piano, with a little heckling from Hugo, who played viola, while Varick and Starr played first and second. There was peace then.

There is strong beauty in the strings. To play on them makes you free, and if you play well the music drives you in upon yourself, isolates you and exalts. Hugo Ferrer often said that music was an unmoral profession, though he was as austere himself as Simon Stylites. But Starr agreed with him, went further and included all the arts.

"There's no room for littleness of mind in a real artist, whether he's a poet, a painter, a writer. To be free is what's important and if an artist professes to belong to a definite religion and lives according to its regimen he is only an artist by accident, if at all." Which, Hugo said, sounded very involved and didn't account for Gilbert Chesterton or Fra Filippo Lippi.

Letting those things be, they were in concord that an artist should work without the limitations that interfere not at all with the bus-conductor, the

constable or the carpenter, but can put appalling strictures on the man who paints nudes or grubs at the ultra-real in writing.

"For where," complained Starr, "would literature be without Rabelais, Casanova and James Joyce?"

"Yes, where indeed," echoed Hugo Ferrer, who preferred Stevenson to the three reprobates above, and had once been caught reading Mrs. Hemans' poems.

The music lived lustily for an hour. The musicians felt better after they had played.

"It's refreshing," said Varick, "I know of nothing so refreshing as music —unless it's cock-fighting."

"That's illegal," said Buller, folding up the piano-score. "Anyway, it's barbarous."

"Ho, ho," laughed Varick.

Hugo laughed, too, and Varick stared at him.

"Do you know about it, Hugo?"

"I know that Benedict Arnold lived in this town and cheated the poor master shipbuilders as he cheated the American revolutionists. I'm aware that William Cobbett was a soldier stationed at Fort Howe in the brave old days and that he fell in love with sweet Jenny, his wife-to-be, when he saw her one morning, it was ten below zero, hanging her things out on the line."

"Oh!" said Varick. "What a boreal picture of the Maud Muller-and-the-Judge school! Fair Jenny up to her knees in snow and William, his nose blue with the frost, but his eyes warm with desire! Proceed, Hugo."

"All these things I know; therefore it is not to be supposed that I am ignorant that cock-fighting is still a popular sport."

"Also?"

"Also that this night, in a short time, a great bout will be staged. But how did you know it, Varick?"

"Quite by accident. Sometimes in the early morning I walk out Sandy Point road. Like Thoreau I follow a straight line, which explains why I landed in a gentleman's *basse cour* one day recently about sun-up and discovered two game-cocks in action. I said this and the gentleman said that. One remark begot another. I knew a Wyandotte from a Guinea Hen, he

found my discourse pleasing and presently I was initiated into the cock-fighting fraternity. Will you go there tonight?"

"We have half-an-hour. Starr?"

"Gladly. It's new to me."

"You'll see some rare blades. Buller?"

"No," growled the piccolo-player. "I don't care for fights of any kind. I'm going home to my wife."

" 'Whereby hangs a tale,' " smiled Hugo.

Varick, Starr and Hugo Ferrer walked across a fallow field to a great barn that looked as deserted and unprepossessing as barns do at twelve o'clock of a moonlight night in October. But they had seen dark, spectral figures go before them. This was the appointed time.

They walked around the barn to a small door by the dunghill. Roderick Dhu, because he would surely disrupt the belligerent cocks, had been left home.

Hugo Ferrer knocked on the door. A man with a lantern in his hand opened it, looked at them and nodded. Hugo nodded back, so did Varick and Starr.

"All right," said the man with the lantern, leading the way to a ladder which they climbed without misgivings, for there was a pile of hay at its foot which would prevent one from getting hurt if one slipped or the ladder broke. Hugo went first, then Varick, then Starr. They climbed into the loft.

Now, you doubtless never have been to a cock-fight, but you may have been to church. It was like that—like church. The big loft was filled with people in that peculiar, tense state of quiescence, a sort of hypnotism peculiar to crowds who listen to a wild-and-woolly evangelist or watch a man about to throw himself off a high roof. There's near-hysteria in that atmosphere. You wait to hear a woman scream or a man swear. A preliminary bout was in progress and the newcomers were greeted with those annoyed, peevish looks that persons get who come late to an important function and tread upon toes on the way to their seats.

The bout ended as they sat down, one of the cocks, when they were held breast-to-breast, having failed to sail into his opponent at the third count of ten. A cheer went up and the crowd became normal human beings once

again. The glare of intentness went out of their eyes, the rigidity out of their bodies. Bets were placed on the main bout, which was scheduled next.

Never was such a serious business. No greater gravity could have been preserved in a court where men were on trial for attempting to blow up the Royal Family. Bleachers, like those one barks one's shins against at circuses, were built around the ring, a miniature of the kind of ring in which coarse pugilists batter each other's faces and get knocked stiff for a million dollars. The card was not a heavy one, merely two bouts; but the feature bout was of international importance, one of the cocks having come all the way from Bangor, Maine. The cocks were kept in big baskets from which came, now and then, horrific croakings and fowl growls.

The crowd was representative. Starr knew many there, rich men, poor men. The mild-looking fellow on the tier below had sold him tooth-paste only yesterday. The fat man, chewing at a dead cigar, owned a large part of the city, yet the deep vermilion of his big face showed that he was ready at any minute to drop dead with excitement over the antics of the spurred gladiators.

Immediately in front of Varick, who sat between Starr and Hugo Ferrer were two dowdy men in earnest converse. One was tall and fat, the other fat and short. Said the short one,

"Yes, I have t' sell the nag soon. Couldn't buy feed t' keep her an' she's an awful eater."

"Too bad," sympathized the tall man. "Times is rotten. I'm pretty low myself, but I bet fifty on the Warhorse. He's a sure thing."

"My eye!" growled the short one. "I put fifty on the Baltimore Topknot. He'll tear the Warhorse t' bits. I seen him in action already."

"Ain't got the stamina," countered the big one. "Wait an' see."

The little one seemed content to wait.

"How's your young fellow comin' along?" he asked solicitously.

The tall one shook his head sadly. "Not so well, not so well a-tall. Can't get him to do a thing except sit around. I've given him everything, but he seems depressed; no interest in nothin'."

"Too bad. He's a good lookin' bird. Of course, he may pick up an' be one o' the best."

They spoke with deep concern. Varick grinned, but Hugo's expression showed a great commiseration for the aggrieved owner of the 'young fellow.' Starr indulged in a meditation on the foibles of man. All this worry over a silly gamecock!

The bout began. A horsy gentleman in wild grey tweeds was second to the Warhorse; a dismal man in black supported the Baltimore Topknot. The two held their charges in opposite corners of the ring. A hush, as when the Lord said unto the winds and waves, "Peace, be still."

The Baltimore Topknot glared mad defiance at his white foe, the Warhorse, who glared back with equal ferocity and jangled his spurs as if to say, "Have at you, caitiff!" The referee, a policeman off-duty, raised his hand and the combat began.

There was no spitting on the claws, little sparring. With deadly intent the cocks leaped upon each other, beaks and spurs, and the feathers flew, the short man picking up such as came near him and sticking them in his pocket, presumably, thought Starr, to stuff cushions with. An awful side swipe from the Baltimore Topknot's port spur nearly deprived the Warhorse of an eye, but the Warhorse countered by tearing enough feathers for a good sized duster from his opponent's crop. Martial clucks and clacks filled the tense air. The referee raised his arm and the seconds seized their charges, hauled them back to their corners and worked on them, principally by bloodthirsty exhortations to rip the guts out of the rival.

"Very close," said the tall one. "A shade in favour of the Warhorse, I'd say."

"Oh, would you!" sneered the short one. "Wait an' see."

The second round began as fiercely as the first, suffering a temporary hold-up while the dismal second was dragged off the horsy gentleman in wild grey tweeds and restrained from his avowed intention of pushing the horsy gentleman's face through the back of his skull. They had disagreed about some point of the rules.

The Warhorse seemed to have the better of it. He made a flying tackle, hit the Baltimore Topknot in the midriff and downed him; then went with great vim about the pleasant task of tearing out eyes and feathers. The Baltimore Topknot fought free and leaped away, displaying a high grade of foot work. He backed to the ropes, the Warhorse following closely.

"The Baltimore Topknot's gonna quit," whispered the tall man. "Just as I said."

"Come on, Baltimore Topknot!" said the short one in agonized tones. "Fight him."

The Warhorse cock was too cocky. There may, indeed there must have been in his cluckings some stinging, derogatory mention of the Baltimore Topknot's wives or family. Suddenly the tables were turned and all the spectators saw and heard was a confused whirling of feathered bodies, lightning clawings and peckings, sanguinary croaks. The Warhorse emerged in flight and would not come back.

"One, two—" and up to ten, counted the referee three times. But the Warhorse, held beak to beak with his foe, came not back.

"That was a bout!" said the short man, his voice shrill amid the din. "A great bout! I knew the Warhorse 'd fall down. He ain't got the breedin' or the trainin'. That Baltimore Topknot's a champeen."

The tall man shook his head mournfully with a good-by-fifty-dollars air.

"Guess I won't sell the nag," said the short one.

"Guess you won't need to," agreed his friend.

The concourse was breaking up, going in orderly fashion down the ladder with the mien of those who have been present at an inspiring and revelatory séance with spirits of the other world, going over in detail, with all sorts of comment, the various points of finesse displayed by the Baltimore Topknot. The consensus of opinion was that the Warhorse was too young and would no doubt be a better bird after a few more go's.

They walked over the high hill of that same Fort Howe where Cobbett had been; passed the place, though they or no one else knew the precise location, where Jenny had hung things on the line. Hugo talked of that, for it was an obsession with him and his knowledge of local history was, Varick said, alarming, since, if he knew so much about the lives of the dead and gone, it was fairly safe to say he could tell a few things about the living. And that was so.

"Beauty walks among us," remarked Hugo when they were descending from Fort Howe hill into the Valley. "In its most becoming guise—that of a woman. Now, I am not much taken with women. I find them delectable—if left alone. I don't permit my eyes to stray, for one so easily becomes troubled because of a pretty face and even I, endowed with, I trust, all

human attributes, have not arrived at too late a day to make a prize ass of myself. You know the woman, Graham."

"I?"

"You looked upon her one Saturday morning when I met you coming from the market. You were perturbed. It is not to be wondered at, for you're young and untamed and not, I fear, as wise in the ways of love as you will be if you see more of her."

Starr was uncomfortable. He had become an ostrich with its head in the sand. To Denise, to Varick in the first shock of finding that his love ran along a queer path, he had spoken of Esther Pym; to Denise by name, for with her there could be no pretending; to Varick—he had talked of good and bad women.

He looked now at Varick and found Varick's eyes upon him and he was still more uneasy, for Varick's opinion he valued much; feared it would be a poor one because of this, half-hoped that Varick had forgotten their conversation of that night not so long ago.

"You admit she is beautiful, Hugo," said Starr.

"And much to be desired—and not hard of attainment."

Starr made a sound that might have been an oath. That was his torture, the thought of Esther Pym being venal, meretricious, cheap.

"Yet the rose may adorn the cankerous breast or the white pure bosom, Hugo," he said, more in answer to his own thought, than to Hugo's speech.

"And be no less a rose," assented Hugo. "And a fair girl may lie in the arms of sin and the embraces of rectitude—and be no less a fair girl? Who shall say?"

"Not I," muttered Varick. "It's a hateful business and one travels the beaten track—"

"O, Buller!" scoffed Hugo. "Surely, Varick, you do not fear to adventure!"

"Perhaps, like Christian and Hopeful, I did adventure and came to Doubting Castle and was beaten by Giant Despair. And perhaps I never got out or if I did I have the marks of the flagellation. But one is never immune —"

"And who would wish to be?" Hugo hit the pavement impatiently with the tip of his black cane. "Love's the big thing in life—the grand adventure.

It can't come out favourably for all who go into it. What do you expect of such an unnatural beast as civilized existence? No; it can't come out shiningly for all, but everyone who goes into it gets the same joy out of it. If she's a kitchen-maid or a queen—what matter? She's a woman. But it's the aftermath that looms big, that is the real part of the game and that proves how relatively little are the kisses and tender flutterings and endearments that seemed to be the whole body and soul of the matter."

"Then only a blind man takes the kitchen-maid when he might have the queen?" asked Starr. "Does one calculate, and prevision the aftermath?"

"There are many unhappy unions, many divorces, slayings of wives and husbands," said Hugo. "Which proves that one neither calculates nor previsions. If one does, he's not a lover but a schemer, not a Romeo but a bloody hard-headed Babbit—not even a Babbit, and he deserves to get a shrew who will hag-ride him to the grave or a light hussy who will jolt him by her own insincerity into the knowledge that Cupid rarely or never tolerates business-methods in his gay carnival. I give much more for the happiness of him who weds in wine than him who eyes her bank-balance while he's kissing the nape of her neck."

"Boiled down, as the soap-men say," smiled Varick. "You think love should be a thoughtless excursion; as if one set out for a picnic and left the place to chance, where his feet should guide him."

"In love—where the heart guides," said Hugo. "Am I right, Graham?"

"I'd like to think so. I'd like to believe that the heart can be trusted."

"Oh, it's the eye. Shakespeare is my authority for that," said Varick. "The eye makes all the trouble. For, did you ever see a blind man unhappily wed? You can't trust your eyes."

"They're all you have to guide you." Starr had an inexcusable habit of treating the most inane discussions seriously. "At first, anyway. And I'm not sure but what they're the safest guides."

"A pretty face, a neat figure, trim ankles and above all the eye that answers eye," said Hugo. "That's the way it goes. And I think that rightly it's a haphazard thing, love. That's the zest and fun of it. You see poor fellows falling in love with an angel-faced, mealy-mouthed girl and making Kerman rugs of themselves for her satin shoes to step on. By-and-by she wears spikes or hob-nailed boots and she's still on their necks. But isn't it fun?"

"To watch," agreed Varick. "If only we could profit by watching and learn from the experience of others what our own will be. But we don't. Miss Angel Face comes along—our special Miss Angel Face, and we get drunk on her beauty and cry to scorn all who would counsel us against her. We think she won't ever trample on us, or rashly believe 'twould be sweet to be a doormat for her muddy shoes. And, lo, we join the great army of the disillusioned. Goodnight, Hugo."

"Goodnight, Varick—Starr. Love can't beat cock-fighting. Better develop a passion for Warhorses, Graham, and let Venus be."

"It's not a case of let be—it's being let be. The distinction is clear?"

"Oh, very. But I wish it could be otherwise."

CHAPTER VII

Life was a jumble. Starr thought, sitting idly smoking by his window, that life was a mess. What had he done? School, college, drifting about a bit, writing silly stories; books that were fodder for the feeble-minded; that made him popular if in them he patted people on the back and cheered for God, King and The Canadian Club. Foolish books, foolish people living in a potato patch and confusing potatoes with stars. Looking after love—love which is woman. And worrying about it, about a woman. Futile business that, and circumscribed by so many things. Good girl, marry her; bad girl, leave her. Do right; avoid wrong. Good, bad; right, wrong. Puzzlement. Go to church and be hypnotized. Don't dare to think. Do what the good folks do. Live life smugly. Never try to think.

Winter just a few months off. Poverty due with winter. But big boats would sneak up the harbour-mouth and this one would bring Sir Something Somebody who would give his views; that one would have as cabin passengers the Hon. Whocares and Lady Pinchit. More views. Men going hungry, lots of places. Little girls cold, little boys hungry, mother trying not to cry, father desperate. Grain in golden tides would be pouring down the chutes, making mad dust in the holds of big ships. No bread worth mentioning. Don't need men, many, to load grain in ships. Machines do that.

Grey, dismal days; cold, glaring days; blue white days like diamonds. Esther Pym in a pseudo-seal coat. Esther Pym going hungry. Perhaps—why should Esther Pym go hungry? For honour—oh, yes, for honour. When men want work there should be work to do. But sullen men, ragged men, dangerous men would walk in the streets. Some woman's purse snatched, the town in a hubbub. Dangerous for citizens to walk in the street.

Sometimes you can get right down to life, almost grasp what it is, by thinking about it. Then it eludes you and you feel rather sick. It was like that for Starr. Then you shrugged your shoulders and plugged along. But it was hard to have vision. You did your best, but you were much like a blind man or like a traveller always going up little hills: you never knew what you would see at the top of the little hill. Usually you found just another hill and you wondered what was at the top of that. But each hill was important. Sometime, you hoped, you'd climb a hill and see what you wanted to see. But what did you want to see?

Perhaps a valley full of gold, perhaps one full of flowers, perhaps—How many people know what they want? Wouldn't life be an awful thing if everyone knew what they wanted? Think of the millions who live by selling people what they don't want, really—what would become of them? But a man in love knew what he wanted. Why, yes, happiness he wanted. Did the poor fool ever get it? Yes, too, if he's just a carnal fellow, if love isn't an immense thing, bigger than a carnal passion, with him. If he doesn't expect too much of love. Esther Pym now—Starr thought of Esther Pym and said to himself, "I really want her. She's a jolly fine woman, pretty and alive. Why shouldn't I want her? She's a woman; I'm a man. There's no reason why she shouldn't be mine. And is it such a terrible thing—to want her? All the good people, the respectable and right people—just picture them!" "This young Starr—!" Sounds of disgust made by touching tongue to mouth-roof. "What could you expect! That's what we have now. Didn't you hear about that woman, a writer, who said the real novelist was creedless, free to do anything—why else be free? That's what we can expect. Going with a woman like that—!"

Starr smiled with glee. Alone in the twilight, sheltered, walled round by his books with his pipe in his hand, his black shoes, looking very real, stretched out before him, everything so real, he smiled. But would he smile if the anticipated became the actual, if people really did say such things? Not he. In Caesarean words, he would "seek safety in flight." Ignominiously, if the fact were known.

This woman writer talking like that, saying a novelist shouldn't have those ordinary ties, shouldn't have to sing certain hymns or say one country was right because it was her country. How radical! She should follow that painter fellow who was swamped by the righteous for displaying the glory of womanhood in all its glory at an art exhibit. Art exhibit—what sins have been committed in thy name!

Starr didn't write much these days. He didn't feel like it, didn't want to feel like it. There were bigger things in life than just turning out copy; better things—a sunrise, orange and crimson, over the Bay of Fundy, an afternoon in the woods when the wind made the leaves dance madrigals and tarantelles—red leaves like women dressed in scarlet, dancing abandonedly, dancing near to death but making merry to the end. Better things—a woman's eyes filled with glamour, when your own are filled with glamour and you can't see she's lying and she can't see you're lying; while you're both telling that funny lie called love. Momentary thing, love. Who believed in love?

Starr said James Joyce was to modern literature what Rabelais used to be to literature. Maybe he believed that. But he couldn't believe in love. Denise pretended she didn't believe in love. That silly attraction of the sexes, of man for woman—yes, of course. That was a fact. That made men and women do crazy things. Varick was doing a crazy thing: he followed after Denise, walked with her, talked with her, rode in the green roadster with her. Varick should know better. Sometimes, Starr was sure, Varick's face had a silly look—like a boy's face when he's passing the house of his beloved and trying to pretend he's just there by accident. Varick, of all men. But Denise was different; no wonder he fell in love with Denise. But for him to kiss her, hold her in his arms, his lips against her cheek while he said what all lovers say—lies, you know—Did one do that with Denise? Would she stand for that?

Esther Pym would. She didn't look at love as an analyst looks on some potion. It was her business. No doubt, she knew a lot about it, far more than the analyst could know about his potion. What did she think of it? Perhaps she hated it. One could get to hate it—such a promiscuous love as hers must be. It would harden a woman, make her defiant; every man's hand against her, a social outlaw. One doesn't discuss such persons.

But she had a soul. It might be, a very good soul. She looked after that black-eyed kid, who must be a little devil to look after sometimes. And she didn't look so hard—no paint at the lips nor rouge on the cheeks nor mascara on the eyes; unlike lots of nice girls. Perhaps she didn't use cosmetics so that more easily men might differentiate her from the nice girls. They talked a lot about her, but in a small town there's not much else to do, and truth suffers; yes, truth is often crucified.

As a decent man, he had no business to think of her. He might readily think of a respectable girl in the same way, with marriage thrown in; formality, sanction, confetti, rice, bills—all that, you know. It would have been quite right. Just what a man should do. A bungalow, children, mortgage, work like a nigger to keep the roof overhead and the mortgage underfoot. Quite all right and as it should be. But no Esther Pyms.

But he had fallen in love, though he didn't believe in love, with Esther Pym. You don't argue against the fact. And love, so said in song and story, is "*enfant de Bohème, qui n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi*." If they'd been on a desert island, marooned for life, just they two, wouldn't it have been all right? "I, Graham Starr, writer of silly stories, do take this evil woman, Esther Pym, for my lawful, wedded wife." They might even be happy on

that hypothetical island. Circumstances raise the deuce with things. On the island Esther would be Esther and he would be himself, but here—

Once he'd seen her, very late, coming out of a restaurant that wasn't a good restaurant, apart from its food. And a fellow forced her into a dirty taxi and it was clear she didn't want to go. But the fellow just laughed and Starr wanted to destroy him, but didn't. One doesn't interfere with such people. But always he could hear that fellow laughing. It was a rotten laugh. It said, "You don't matter. You come along. You're just what you are and I do what I please."

Starr remembered that incident. It was a hellish incident. God, this girl had some beauty about her. Mightn't it go deeper than the skin, mightn't she be all right? They talked about souls, one to each person. What about Esther's?

The Reverend Hilary Rhodes thought of Esther's soul. He was a good man and high priest of a temple, a modest temple. He prayed sincerely, and in Sunday-school the children loved him, for he made God seem a very kind and gentle God and not so terribly harsh. To his wife and family the Reverend Hilary was a fine husband and father and to all men he was a man. There is no anti-climax; the Reverend Hilary was all this.

Starr's mother used to go to this temple. Starr's father never went to any temple, but smoked many cigars on Sundays, read Swedenborg and even talked about metempsychosis. Starr didn't know the Reverend Hilary, but had known his father, who was also a good man.

Reverends don't usually bother with Esther Pyms. No blame for that; Esther Pyms don't wish to be bothered with as a rule. It would be a waste of time. And the vestrymen, if they saw a Reverend talking with Esther, and had, by chance, got *Elmer Gantry* from their circulating library and read it, might have held a meeting and listened with unbelieving ears to explanations.

But the Reverend Hilary didn't fear vestrymen and what he wished to do, he did. So when, this day in late October, Esther walked with the boy at the foot of Wadham Street where one could see dredges at work trying to dig millions of dollars out of a mudhole where they'd been sunk, the minister spoke to her. Much like Christ spoke to Magdalen and with much the same effect.

Esther cried. There, standing beneath a maple tree that dropped a leaf gently now and then, Esther listened to this good man, and cried.

A few months ago Esther would not have cried. She might indeed have bluntly told this godly man to mind his own business and go to hell. But she didn't now. She had done much thinking in the meantime, and taken a word into her vocabulary, a word which was, "worthwhile." A lying word.

But Esther when she watched Starr from her window thought it would be worthwhile to get out of this mess and be, of all things, respectable. Poor Esther. It would be worthwhile to be able to walk in the streets and have men act like gentlemen, insofar as they were able, because she was a lady. To work hard and make honest money, to feel that all the world wasn't against you, not to feel like so much mud before fine men, clean men, like Mr. Starr—Esther thought like that.

So the Reverend Hilary Rhodes spoke to her when speaking to her would do most good. She was hypnotized by that idea of the worthwhile. The minister's face was lean. He had a hawk-nose, thin lips that made his mouth seem gentle. And his eyes glowed and burned with what imaginative people call a "light of sanctity." There is a much better explanation for that glow, but it doesn't relate. The minister's voice was the kindest voice Esther had ever heard. According to him, the world was a pretty decent place to live in and it wasn't at all hard to be good. He knew all about Esther, but didn't rub it in. He forgot it all, seemingly, and talked of what a girl could do to make herself very good and happy and respected.

Eric, while the minister talked, tugged at Esther's hand and swore roundly once at a small boy across the street on a tumbledown doorstep, who was making faces at him. But the minister talked on, and Esther listened and began to feel very good inside and not nearly so defiant and poorly organized. That's the way she had been, the way all immoral people are—it is to be supposed she was rather immoral than unmoral—not strong, as if all their forces were running wild and the world of good could blow them away with a breath. She had been a fugitive, but this man told her she could cease being a fugitive; that she might even join the righteous pack, and if she wished, pursue other fugitives. And Esther dreamed. She thought of Graham Starr, of Denise Raye, of all good people, and envied them and pictured it as high heaven to be as they were.

The end of it all was that Esther went home, after the Reverend Hilary's cordial farewell, with the determination to cast off her evil ways and live the good life. She would go to work and win respectability. This acquiring of an

aim in her aimless life strengthened her. She read help-wanted lists in the evening paper and wondered if she'd have much trouble in getting a place as a clerk in a store, say, or as a maid-servant or a nurse. She had great confidence in her ability to work and give satisfaction.

Now, we are creatures of habit, it is said. Therefore, it would be miraculous for Esther to slough over night her sinful cloak and emerge chaste. It would have been miraculous, if there had not been going on in Esther for a considerable time a great deal of moral chemistry, reactions and so on. She was tired of drunken men, of being at their call, of having a ridiculous name among taxi-drivers and blackguards. It all made her sick. She pondered on the good people she saw and thought of Starr, so that even to think of him made her unutterably ashamed of herself. She felt bitter and desperate and grim and determined. She had formulated a splendid resolution.

Thus, Esther Pym, on the following day, sent the boy off to school, where he didn't have much fun, what with one fight and another, and went to look for work. In this search for work she discovered a truly amazing truth that may or may not be new, but should at any rate be given a lot more prominence than it receives. This truth is that the best Christians are Jews.

Esther learned that. She went first to Stodhart's, a big drygoods store that wanted girls to work for next to nothing. Esther didn't know much about the place, so she wandered here and there and got all tangled up before she came to the little box-like office of a little foxy-faced man who set his finger-tips together, parted his lips in a ghost of a smile, stared through his spectacles and said,

"Well, what can I do for you?"

Esther told him. Of course, she had no experience, but for five dollars a week— She had no references. What had she worked at before this? She couldn't tell him she had gone with men and they had given her money. It would never do to tell him that. The foxy-faced gentleman probably sang in the choir and watched the length of his daughters' skirts. Esther couldn't tell him. He found out she had no people, but looked after a boy, her sister's boy —yes. He didn't believe that.

So they didn't get anywhere and it's probable he wouldn't have bothered with her that much if her face hadn't been so pretty and her body so beautiful. At last, another man came and Esther knew him, but he didn't know her—not just now. He spoke in a whisper to the foxy-faced man who looked dazed and said, "Oh!"

You can tell a lot from the way a man, or a woman for that matter, says, "Oh!" Esther expected him to say what he actually did say.

"I fear, Miss Pym, that—oh—you wouldn't be suitable, not quite suitable for our business. I'm sorry—"

Esther went from there, feeling the foxy-faced man's eyes upon her, knowing what he was thinking. It might be that, until he had learned she wasn't what she should be, he hadn't dared think like that. She heard some shop girls sniggering and knew they were laughing at her. Perhaps just one had known of her and had told the others. Esther's dark face was defiant, her chin held proudly up. But it wasn't going to be so easy to follow this god of respectability. Once she got started, it mightn't be so bad. But her treatment in Stodhart's might be just a sample of what she'd get in other places. But she went bravely to a hotel that wanted a girl for general work. There was a smiling young man there, who smiled wider when he saw her; for he knew her and couldn't figure out why she was there. "Up to some game," his eyes said, "I know you're up to something, you pretty devil." Sure, he'd give her a job and her first duty was to give him a kiss and—

Esther left that place, quite a bit daunted. She hadn't dreamed it would be so hard. But she wouldn't give up, not she. There must somewhere be a job of work she could get. All men weren't like Foxy-face or Smiling-face. Why should they take so much into count what she had been? It wasn't fair. They blamed her for being bad; now she wanted to be good, and one sneered and the other leered and none believed her.

It was just a succession of that all day. She could have had places, but she couldn't have held them unless she reverted to the Esther Pym that she had cast off. Men wouldn't let her alone. No good men wanted her or dared have her, on account of what she had been. The men who did want her, thought of her only as she had been. It was all too impossible.

Then she came to Sternberg's. It was a notion-store that sold everything imaginable, that had a show window like an Eastern bazaar or a peddler's pack suddenly dumped out on a table. Meyer Sternberg was fat and had the bodily build of a kewpie. He smoked cigars; there was always one in the corner of his wide mouth. He had a piercing eye and a rather mystic cast of countenance.

To Meyer Sternberg, Esther seemed a likely sort of girl. Pretty face, fine figure, look good behind the piled-up aprons and house-dresses on his counter. Why not? References didn't weigh so much. He'd pay her for what she did. So Esther Pym found that the best Christians are Jews. For Meyer

Sternberg knew—he guessed. Still, his last girl had brought references, but she had stolen things right and left.

He would give Esther eight dollars a week, but she'd have to work three nights. Eight dollars. She did some rapid thinking. Yes, she might keep herself and Eric on that. Anyway, she would be respectable. Esther Pym, clerk in Sternberg's, earning eight a week, living like an honest woman. People might laugh at first, but soon they'd get to know what she was about and in time they'd forget. It seemed that way to her.

She looked forward to the next morning, when she would go to work. It wouldn't be so bad. She could get home in time at noon to give Eric his lunch. The rest of the day he could shift for himself. No need to worry about Eric. Maybe Graham Starr, she shyly thought, would hear about her and admire her for this comeback. She would have been amazed and her black eyes would have flashed balefully, if someone had told her it was because of Starr she threw up her easy way of life and became a clerk in Sternberg's store at eight dollars a week.

Starr represented for Esther all things good—that other world she didn't know so much about, where everything was decent, even men and women; where there was no sordidness, drunkenness and hideous perversion, that strange world they call society. Starr, rather than the good Hilary, had been the priest of her uplift. Starr preached silent sermons to her when she saw him talking with Denise. He made her think good thoughts when he passed her in the street, little-girl thoughts, coloured thoughts of the Cinderella type, made her long for clean things.

He directed her destiny. He drew her from the mire and put her behind the counter in Sternberg's. He made her expect something good of life and at nights now, timidly, she addressed a little prayer to that aloof God to come closer and help her with His steady hand. The Reverend Hilary, seeing her again, gave her a book in which she read the story of the Magdalen.

Esther Pym had stepped from a bed of roses, more or less, into a nettle-patch. It wasn't at all agreeable. She had many temptations and many doubts. Life had never before been monotonous. Lots of variety in her old existence; but none, strange to say, in Meyer Sternberg's variety-store.

Fat women, scrawny women, sharp-tongued and mild women came to Sternberg's, pulled this dress and hauled that dress and asked questions and all the time let it clearly be known that they thought they were being swindled.

Esther bore it wearily. It was a shame that this was the price of virtue. She had, in the last analysis, been no worse than Du Barry, La Pompadour or Amy Lyon, Lady Hamilton, or any number of others, who, had they decided to be good, could have done so in perfect ease and comfort and have taken up embroidery or social-uplift to pass away the time. Esther's reform was splendid; that eight dollars Meyer Sternberg handed her the first Saturday night was honestly earned, every single penny of it.

Esther was tired these days; eyes ached, arms ached, body ached. No joke to be on your feet ten and more hours at a time. And she hadn't found much peace yet nor was her spirit exalted. The old ways, easy ways, beckoned. Why not? After all, one lived—merely that. Was it so important how one lived? Yes, it must be when people had hard looks for her, who led a funny sort of life; when the only way to purchase even tolerable immunity was by being respectable.

Now she was being respectable. The Reverend Hilary, in his gentle way, would have smiled if he had seen her there behind the counter, this pale, big black-eyed girl in black dress and white cuffs and collar, who seemed oddly out of place among flat cardboard boxes and hanging drapes and the silly things women wear for underclothing. The Reverend Hilary would have patted her on the cheek or the shoulder or the back—for he was prodigal as Varick of his touches, maybe better intentioned—and told her she had done very well to flout and thus defy the Devil and do the will of God. Oh, well, if God willed that she should spend so many drab hours in a stuffy store, she would spend them. Esther Pym did not lack spirit, backbone. She had made a resolve she was going to be good; meaning by that she was going to be chaste and very honest.

As yet, the world hadn't noticed it. Esther still heard whispers, sneers; felt still unkind and mocking looks; knew they still thought she was what she had been. To date, the people had not cried out, "Lo, what has come upon Esther Pym; for surely now she is a good woman!" No, the people hadn't said that. But they'd know in due time. Surely people aren't slow to discover the fact that you're leading a good life, when they're so lightning-quick to pounce on the possibility that you're leading a bad one!

So, Esther went from Wadham Street to Main Street twice a day, and back. She grew thinner and acquired a rather ghostly, spiritual expression, as if she had been in a convent and long subject to its rules. She was leading a conventual existence. Eight dollars a week doesn't permit of Sybaritic living nor yet of even a very modest board. Not when there's rent to be paid and a boy and a woman to be kept clad.

In the background was Graham Starr. She didn't see him now and she missed seeing him. But he was no less real and vivid for lack of his corporal presence. She had, indeed, come nearer to him. She belonged now to the life that was his life and it was not in her to confess that, if it was his life, it was a pretty hard and decidedly colourless affair. No wonder heaven was such a splendid place and imaginative folk, like darkies, said it had golden streets and all sorts of splendid conveniences, if this was what one had to go through to get there. It needs must be a remarkable place to make up for Sternberg's and quarrelsome, fault-finding bargain-seekers and stinted food and patched clothing. One like Esther Pym might have had so easy a time—if she didn't care about golden streets.

Really, Esther didn't think much of what hereafter of heaven would accrue to her to make up for this hell on earth. She was doing something, striving for something that she could not have named, some formless splendid thing that was worthwhile. Out of the ruck of sin and sordidness this thing had emerged and called to her. Was it the teachings of childhood still persisting in her? The voice of a kindly God that spoke to her of a better way? Was it, by some ancient alchemy, a form of love?

She thought of Starr. Tall young man, clean young man, good young man; and that formless thing almost took shape—to be as he would want her to be, to rise to him, not to feel when she passed him that she was rather less than dirt, some sort of a creature, something he didn't like. She never formulated those thoughts. She just tried blindly to be right, to kill the old fires that in reality had never warmed her. And gradually she came to feel different within. Serenity came to her who had been turbulent. She had ease of soul as she had hardship of body. The cares of the world sat lighter upon her. She knew how to work now, how to seem patient with vulgar people. Oddly enough, she felt superior to these fat and thin women and in her heart pitied them. There was not in their lives a glowing pale blur of light afar off that drew them to it, that gave direction to their efforts, that even caused them to make efforts. But there was in her. She didn't feel just like a shopgirl, thinking of her fellows and how much powder she could pile on her nose and if her lips were just right. Esther didn't think of those things. Men, except as they were men, had never interested her much. They were feeble creatures, maudlin, helpless, setting store on such trivial things as a woman's lips, going in ecstasy over the symmetry of her limbs, behaving as self-respecting apes never would behave—the men she had known. Rouge, paint and powder had never been popular with her, who had no need of them.

Esther Pym was tolerably contented. She hoped she might learn to like this sort of thing, but secretly doubted she ever would. It was good, however, not to have to be so defiant, not to carry the burden of some heinous guilt about with her, not to feel that she was one of those "necessary evils" that legislators talk about when someone suggests cleaning up a city. She mattered for something now; to herself anyway. She was getting along as thousands of other young women were getting along, poverty-stricken, pleasure-starved, but in some degree consoled by the knowledge they were being decent.

Esther Pym was not one of those rare women who give serious thoughts to life, who question it and refuse to take a lot of things on someone's say-so. It puzzled her, nonetheless. Respectable, well-behaved women sometimes have thoughts subversive of the existing social order, those women who have children tagging onto them from the first year of marriage to the sad day of eye-closing. Happiness—a measure of it—children are so cute, you know. Heartache—a plethora of heartache—such a care, children; one is always worrying lest the small girls be run down by motor-cars, the big girls picked up by motor-cars. Then, too, boys are boys. And boys and girls both want to live their own lives. It makes a mother's heart sore. Tyrannical mothers are few these days; children know more.

Like Starr, Esther thought life was a mess; she did not, unlike Starr, get angry about it and look grim about it and think, "Damn it, I'll get somewhere in this business. I'll find out what it's all about if I break myself in the finding. I won't be resigned to it; not I." Esther took it as it came. Varick, knowing more about it, took it as it came. So, Hugo Ferrer. But Denise Raye was becoming more militant, more like Starr—fiery souls.

Esther got along all right. It was interesting, the manipulation of that eight dollars; just as thrilling as the time a collie has on a short leash. To go on that way indefinitely—eight dollars a week. She just didn't think of it or she might have become discouraged. Esther thought only of the day. Yesterday being dead, tomorrow unborn, today is the only thing to be concerned about. Only by adopting that philosophy could Esther find her lot bearable. It was a big fight to take the drabness out of each day. Work made her forget. At night she sat with Eric and read or helped him with his lessons. She kept the door locked; old friends were friends no longer. Sometimes she heard a laugh outside the door; a curse sometimes. Heavy steps on the rickety stairs.

One night she passed Starr. That was a night! On Pendock Street, near Hugo Ferrer's, though she didn't know where Hugo Ferrer's was. Starr was

coming from there. He had been arguing with the musician on the subject of whether or not, even in tolerable degree religion had fulfilled that nineteen-hundred-year-old promise of "*in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*," and, as usual, getting nowhere whatsoever.

Because it was after six in late November, Pendock Street was glimmering with early street lights that shone with grey blue light on the snow. Esther saw him from afar off, and he too observed her. As is usual in such cases, their meeting began from the time they were mutually aware of each other and lasted long after they had passed. A little tumult was in Esther's breast and Starr felt his heart leap. He had wondered about her, where she was. He couldn't find out. He didn't know the people she knew. Anyway, a respectable young man doesn't go up to someone and say, "Where is Esther Pym these days?" It wouldn't do.

That meeting was—wonderful to both of them. Proudly Esther walked, because she was a good woman and did not quail to have him look upon her now. Somewhere she had read that it's not what you were, that counts, but what you are. She was all right now. He surely must know she was all right.

In the funny evening light of Pendock Street, near the chemist's shop where there was a blue glass jar and an amber glass jar, immense jars, in the window, they passed and their eyes met, locked, held. And Starr muttered, "Damme, she's lovely; lovelier than my dreams of her." Esther thought, "He knows me and is glad to see me. He's friendly to me. He didn't look at me—that way." No, she was sure he hadn't looked at her—that way. A man like Graham Starr wouldn't. He was a very good man and would feel as elated as the Reverend Hilary about her turning decent and going the way to glory in Sternberg's at eight dollars a week.

Esther was very happy that night. If Sternberg next day had said he was going to cut her down to seven a week she'd have stayed. She felt that proud of her new status. She'd have stayed at any wage. But she left Sternberg's next day. Why was that? Simply because the Jew turned Christian.

CHAPTER VIII

Meyer Sternberg had pinched Esther's cheek. It was unfortunate. Esther was at first astonished, but there was no mistaking Meyer's intention when he did that. It was late Saturday night and Sternberg's Variety Store was about to close up. He had paid Esther her eight dollars and held, suggestively, more in his pudgy hand. He had his coat off and his shirt was not of the cleanest. He sweated under the armpits. He made Esther sick. She felt outraged when he pinched her cheek and looked at her—like that.

She walked away from him, angry. She had almost forgotten the Esther Pym who didn't at all mind a man's pinching her cheek, because it was her business not to mind. Sternberg brought the old Esther back. What had happened to Sternberg? She had been there a month, during which he had not bothered her except to make her work like a galley-slave.

He scowled at her when she backed away, and chewed on his cigar. He had big tufty black eyebrows and looked like the devil.

"Don't be so uppish," said he. "You ain't got reasons to act like that with me. I'll do the right thing, treat you decent. You're a pretty good sport, I guess, from what I hear. Can't figure why you came to work for me, unless you thought you could get around me better that way. I've kept my eye on you—"

"Greasy pig," said Esther, putting on her coat. "I came to work for you because I wanted to earn money—decently. That was my only reason."

"Yeah, I should believe that—a girl like you wantin' to earn money decent—"

Esther left Sternberg's that night, innocent but jobless. She was glad it was a dark, snowy night; people couldn't see she was crying. Eight dollars a week—a hard, grinding week. And Sternberg didn't believe she was trying to be good. No one believed it. But she wouldn't give in. She'd fight still harder and stay good, if it killed her. But it wasn't easy. They lied who said it was easy. The Reverend Hilary lied, or else he didn't know the facts. The foxy-faced man, the smiling-faced man, Sternberg—they were the facts. They didn't want her to be good. They tried to pull her down, they scoffed at her hopes of being something worthwhile.

It was real winter now. Snow blew in her face, lay sullenly on her coat, swirled around her. People hurried by. She went to the market and spent a dollar—one out of the precious eight. She had a few more at home. But it was winter now. No work for her. Only luck had given her the chance in Sternberg's. She knew it. Other girls had come looking. There would be a score on hand Monday, ready to fill her place. No work for anyone. The same all over. Depression. Grain trickled slower into the holds of big vessels. Men went hungry. The Reverend Hilary had written to the paper: "There are so many, this winter, who do not know where their next meal is coming from, who have no coal or wood to keep them warm. One family has eight children, the mother is blind, the father out of work; another family has a new baby, there are three children, the father has no work; another has seven children, the father has been ill and now has no employment. There are so many more cases that, through the pride of the stricken ones, do not come to our attention."

The Reverend Hilary wrote like that. Esther Pym read it. It seemed very real to her, easy to picture. Poverty was never far off from her now. When she came home from her last night at Sternberg's she shook the snow from her poor coat and blew on her fingers to warm them; her gloves were not lined, not comfortable. The fire in the stove was just a few grey-red coals that gave no warmth. Eric had long been abed, driven there by the cold.

She stood over him. The lamp burned dimly on a small table at the foot of his cot. Beyond it Esther looked into grey gloom, shadows. On the wall her own shadow was huge, bending, flickering. She shivered. The place was ghostly tonight. The wind rattled the rotten window sashes and snow swished against the panes. She walked over to the window. In the house across the street, the Rayes', lights showed ruddily, warmly. Esther watched them a long time, aglow behind the heavy window-hangings. Then she went back to Eric. He had coughed and stirred restlessly. She touched his face. It was hectic. He had not been feeling lively all day, though he had coasted with Pat and Diarmid that afternoon and pestered the Grassman, now engaged in shovelling off the wooden steps that took one from the Common down to Wadham Street.

Eric's face was hot. Esther frowned. It alarmed her, that strange, strong heat in the cold room, that living heat. She tucked the clothes warmer about him and went to build up the fire. Fears swarmed around her. Suppose Eric became very ill, suppose she could find no honest work. People went hungry now, many of them. But must she go hungry and the boy suffer for lack of

remedies which money could buy? Surely it wouldn't be right to let suffering come to them when she could avert it!

But others suffered, she knew. And, yes, it was true that there were women who, though driven to the farthest extreme, would not stoop to sin. They, she said, were good women. Such as she was now, such as she had set out to be. Some things were to be prized above life itself. Virtue, now, that such a little while ago she had lightly valued—virtue was to be guarded at any cost. Let her go hungry, let the little boy die, if only virtue live. And, oddly, it seemed reasonable and right to her that it should be so. She did not realize, as Starr would have, that this was slavery to a big machine, that she was ready to suffer very real, human suffering for the sake of the bloodless juggernaut which is social convention, which lives on because so many people, lazy people, like Varick, like Buller and all worthy folk, say it's the best we have, therefore let's make the best of it. Russia had a revolution; thank God we're not Russia! We can't go along on nothing. We dare not knock down all our laws and time-honoured customs overnight and start to experiment all over again. Why, in the end, we'd probably get back to where we were in the beginning. Just let's not bother!

Esther felt a dull sickness of the spirit, a pain worse than bodily pain because it is not localized. It's not in the heart nor in the head. It's all about one. In the darkness of the room it was about her, a fearful, depressing pain. Through the cracks of the stove the fire gleamed and outside she could hear the snow. Thoughts marched in quick procession through her brain—Starr, Denise, Sternberg, the foxy-faced man, the smiling-faced man, fat bargain-seekers and thin ones; many men she had known in the past. And because there was nothing to think about of the future, she wanted to die, to be able no longer to think.

Her eyelids ached before sleep came to her. Eric in his cot, so near that she could touch him, tossed and turned and coughed. She prayed he would stop. Each time he coughed it set her nerves a-jangle and made her want to cry out. He shouldn't cough like that. He shouldn't lie here, in this pitiful, drafty, wretched place. She shouldn't be here. Others had rooms so warm that for comfort it was necessary to open the windows. And she was cold in bed. If she could have looked forward to going to work on Monday, going to Sternberg's to stand all day behind the counter, it wouldn't have been so hard. But even that poor comfort was denied her. Monday would come, cold, prospectless. The rest of the world would be busy, ignoring her. Then she would have again to undertake the hopeless quest for work. There was no work, even for girls who had never been like Esther Pym. It would be the

same thing over. They wouldn't want her to stay good. Men would look at her, appraising her not for the work she could do, but as they appraise a fine animal, a dog or a horse, for its points of elegance. They would see she had very bright black eyes, a little red mouth, full-lipped; a woman's form. Then they would smile hatefully and say by that smile, "Oh, you are Esther Pym. We know who you are. We're willing to accept you as Esther Pym, but don't dare pose as a decent girl; you're not a decent girl."

Could hell be worse than that, to look forward to? Not much. And was ever woman born into the world to undergo like experience? She was not. Man has made the machinery that nips the woman's fingers and drives her off. It's all man's work. To say God did it in His inscrutable wisdom is to insult and vilify Him. Christ, the god of the Christians, did not use women so. He proved that God never willed a woman to be scorned and buffeted because she had done sin. Buddha, Mahomet, Brahma were not harsh with women, they, the gods and prophets of their people. Well, whence this the fine paradox that the man who, in obedience to God's law, will scorn to steal his sister's savings, yet reviles her, in contradiction to Christ's example, if she sin?

Esther thought like that. The story of the Magdalen was fresh with her. It had given her hope in the beginning. Was Christ the only one who forgave sin like hers? Did all other men despise her because she had fallen? True, these people did not surround her in the street and with names and insults greet her, nor did they throw stones. Yet was their cruelty more effective in its own immaterial shape. Often a look hurts more than a stone, silence goes deeper than a jeer, a laugh makes graver impress than a cut. Wherein, therefore, has the world advanced?

Esther Pym went to sleep some time before the dawn. And such a sleep it was! The Reverend Hilary walked with her in a green field where the grass was high and where a river flowed smoothly, deeply. Daisies and blue flowers grew there, higher than the grass. She was very happy for a while, walking there with the good man who talked with her, though she did not know what he was saying. Then, without warning, he took her in his arms, this man of God, and kissed her and said, "Esther I am only a man; and you are a woman." There the dream ended. Esther awoke, strangely hot, trembling, sick.

"God!" she whispered into the greyness, through clenched teeth. "Such a dream—such a rotten dream! It shows me what I am—that I could think such a thing, even in a dream. I have sinned against him. He's so good, a saint. He's like Graham Starr—not dirty, not being just a man, which is just

being an animal." Why should a good man have walked in her dream, and acted like any other man? She was thankful then that it had not been Starr. To Esther, Starr was better than the Reverend Hilary. The minister was a good man because it was his business to be good, while Starr was good because it was the highest state of man, because in his essence he was good.

Why, in her dreaming, had the Reverend Hilary said, "Esther, I am only a man; and you are a woman?" What did he mean by that. Did it all come down to that, man and woman—the saint, after all, just a man; the sinner, in her guilt, just a woman? Was the rest all serious acting, grave pretence and deadly make-believe? Esther's thoughts became a jumble. All her life she had taken the laws of this world for granted, unquestioningly. They were there, undeniable, immutable. One thing was right; the other wrong. This must be done, that avoided. Who said so? God said so; then be it far from Esther Pym, poor girl, sinful girl, to take arms against God and question that He was right. Now the first doubts and wonderings being come to her, she felt aghast; fearful as one who has touched a stone of a great structure long believed unshakeable, only to find the stone crumble and the whole thing shiver and sway.

When they arose, Eric was pale and shaky, but he did not cough so much. Esther would not let him go out after breakfast. It was Sunday morning, that most cheerless, depressing period in the week's life. Sunday morning—doleful bells, people walking in groups to this church and that church to pray, to worship. People looking dressed up and uncomfortable in soul and body. The Sabbath, mournful day of rest and recollection. Some won't play cards, others won't go in swimming or take any amusement—because it is the Sabbath.

Esther Pym didn't like the Sabbath, but she didn't mind it. One could rest and read a book. She didn't go to church, ever, or send Eric to Sunday-school. Since she had decided to be good, she had thought of going to church; but only timidly, only vaguely. She didn't feel the need of church or understand exactly why she should go. The reason, so good for most people, that everyone else went, was no reason at all for Esther. She hadn't become a good woman because every other woman was good. She knew better. But she didn't quite know why she tried to be a different person from her old self; except that to try, satisfied a hunger in her.

That afternoon Denise Raye went skiing. She was not one of the straight-laced, though usually she went to prayer-meeting at least once on

the Lord's Day. But skiing was no harm, she believed. Varick, who was with her, gave it no thought whatever. His life was so ordered that Sunday made no appreciable difference in it. He always managed to sleep later on Sundays, however; the dismal bells irritated him greatly and caused him to speculate on just how many bells rang when the Master walked abroad, when He preached or performed His mercies on the blind, the dumb, the maimed. Nowhere could he recall bells having been rung. That bothered him, for Christianity, strong as it is for tradition, should be equally firm against innovation. There's something wrong about billboards advertising the right road to Paradise and newspaper menus of spiritual food doled out each Sunday.

Varick enjoyed skiing. With Denise Raye along, he found it far more delightful. Denise was slim and strong and lightsome. The laughing blue eyes and titian hair belonged to her Celtic forbears, but in her face was the impress of the Northland, that comes even in a single generation, that is strength and fearlessness and a certain reproach for weaker nations.

Varick's face showed strength, too, and the confidence of the cosmopolite; but not the hardy strength of the North. This girl, he thought and marveled at the thinking, burned and exulted in icy blasts, in blizzards and zero weathers. She flew over the snow on runners and laughed at jumps that made beholders gasp. The ice and snow was her habitat. He could see in her a sign of what the future race would be—a silent people, stern; a thinking, deliberate, relentless people. Conquering races come out of the North. These people would shun softness, and the vices that sapped Rome would never have a chance to weaken them.

All this pondered Varick as he trudged with Denise up the steep, slippery hill to the Park, the long light runners poised on their shoulders, ski-poles helping their footing on the treacherous ice. The sky was an innocent winter sky—delicate blue, touched here and there with fleecy white that drifted across it like smoke-puffs from Jove's big briar. That was Varick's simile. It was characteristic of Varick. Denise, laughing, said so. She liked Varick; he was sheer, unadulterated man, the man of pipes, books, dogs, horses, careless raiment and sturdy thought. Yet he had delicate perceptions. No conversation ever went beyond Varick.

After that first encounter, he had been content to leave their future meetings on the lap of the gods, who had been well disposed. Shortly after the Exhibition he had met her in company with Starr. Introductions were unavoidable, then, and Varick was glad. There was already a bond between them, a tacit understanding that, he hoped, was more than mere friendship.

He debated long with himself about what should be his attitude towards this cool young goddess and what his future relations with her. Then, after all the debate, he followed his inclination and went often with her.

She was not unwilling. Starr was apart from her now, a stranger in whose company she felt angry, helpless, ill-at-ease. She tried to tell herself that Starr meant nothing to her, had never mattered with her, except as he was her intimate and very good friend. His loving this other woman did not destroy his claim on her friendship, should he wish to push that claim. But, clearly, he did not and she agreed that the situation was impossible, that they could no longer go together even as friends.

Varick knew little about that. He was sure Starr did not love Denise and she made it plain to him that she did not care for Starr.

"We were always good friends, Gray and I," she told Varick lightly. "We've never sacrificed friendship to any other attachment. We're better for it. He is my friend, just as you are my friend."

Varick was dubious about that. He was honest with himself. Once he had been badly burned by a woman, but that experience made him no wiser than it does the rest of mankind. The beauty of Denise Raye swept over him, annihilating his fine logic, his philosophical understanding of life and love, captivating him, making him want her as man has always wanted woman.

Skiers in gay costumes, blue, red, white, dotted the slopes of the Park, the slopes leading down to the lake. There was a high jump built and daring men and girls sailed off into the air like funny, big-clawed birds. Out on the lake an oval rink was cleared and skaters, small in the distance, glided 'round and 'round. Trampers passed on snowshoes with long, loping strides. The snow was powdery, inches deep over a hard crust; the air bitingly keen, with a tonic freshness.

Denise and Varick fastened their harness and sailed off down the slope, keeping nearly abreast, out onto the lake. They crossed the lake. On the far shore was a man with a dog. Hugo Ferrer. Varick stayed to talk. Hugo's nose was blue with cold, Roderick Dhu's long snout was covered with fine white powder, his eye was wild. It made him young again to frolic in the drifts.

Denise went ahead. She knew Hugo Ferrer; not very well. She could hear him and Varick talking and laughing. She would have waited for Varick had she not seen Starr ahead of her on snowshoes, tramping up a road that went between tall evergreens. Denise followed him, using the skis like skates, travelling faster than he. She wanted to call out to him, but something sealed her lips and made it very hard for her to speak his name.

At last he turned, saw her and waited until she came up to him. They looked at each other and smiled.

"Hello, Gray," she said then, noting that he looked very well and his body, clad in corded breeches and white sweater was thin, wiry like steely metal. The cold wind did not flush his cheeks whatever.

"I thought it was you and Varick I saw crossing the lake. Did you meet Hugo Ferrer?"

"Varick is talking with him. I came ahead."

"Shall we wait for him to come up? There's a log over there—"

They sat down on an old pine trunk, quite far apart. They talked idly. They smoked. It was all so impersonal. Inwardly she fumed and wondered what it would be like if he should take her into his arms and kiss her. That seemed to be far from his thoughts. She couldn't guess at his thoughts. He stared down the road, looking for Varick, seemingly impatient of her presence, wanting Varick to come.

Was he afraid of her? Afraid to treat her as men treat women. He was good to look at. It would be pleasant to have him kiss her. It might even hurt her delightfully—his arms about her. Silly thoughts, she would have called these a few months ago, but now they seemed vital, really significant in her life. Why didn't Graham want her? Did Esther Pym own him now? He looked preoccupied. Perhaps he was going to meet Esther. She didn't like to ask him.

She had come closer to him and their shoulders touched, a dizzy contact for her, a casual one for him. He was, or pretended to be, unconscious of her.

"Having a pretty decent time with Varick?" he asked, idly enough.

"Quite good. He reminds me of you."

"Doesn't he make love to you, then?"

"Not he—not any more than you did."

"So you're content with him?"

"Why blame it on me if men don't make love to me? I'm just a maiden."

"With no illusions, very matter-of-fact and cool-headed."

"Is any woman that, really?"

"I don't know. My knowledge of women is not so extensive as I once thought it. It's not safe to take anything about women for granted. Right now

—”

He looked at her. She was, as he had said, matter-of-fact, cool-headed; yet now her eyes were starry under their lowered lids, her lips slightly parted as if waiting to be kissed.

“Yes?” she whispered.

“Oh, nothing,” said Starr lamely. He was thinking how beautiful she was. Yet a man couldn’t trifle with her and play at kissing and ordinary love-making. He didn’t dare think of that. If one kissed Denise, one would marry Denise. He didn’t want, he was sure, to marry anyone. It was too big a price to pay for just having someone to love. And one didn’t think of Denise as a companion in any illicit excursion. To have her, a man would have to give himself body and soul forever. She was like that, intense, dominating. He did fear her in a way. She was a constant, silent rebuke to him, who desired Esther Pym and thought so much of her.

But he had got no nearer to Esther. He was here, she was there. And what was to bring them together? A grosser man would have gone to her and made known to her what was in his mind. Starr could not do that—not yet. Perhaps he might want her so much that he would go to any lengths to have her. He felt now that he had no business with Denise. Varick seemed the proper one for her. Varick and she would doubtless get married. For a while, just then, he had thought she was tempting him, trying him, wanting to make him forget himself and kiss her.

It would mean a rebuff, he assured himself. It would mean that she would speak about Esther Pym, who stood between them. He wished Varick would come and when at last the big man appeared down the road Starr felt relieved. He walked a little way further with them, then took a path into the woods where they, on skis, could not go and with an embarrassed farewell, left them.

Solitude seemed precious to him, a solitude where thought was his only company, thought of Esther. Denise and Varick—they were all right, sane, normal persons. Nothing would worry them over much. Not love, which to him was a tremendous thing and caused him much doubt and discomfort.

That evening on Pendock Street when he had met Esther, hurrying home—he recalled that yet. There was glamour, mystery, allure about Esther Pym, whether she were good woman or bad. It didn’t matter much what she was. Even, the knowledge that she trod the primrose path, made her more desirable in his eyes, which dared not look on Denise Raye because she was innocent.

He raged, impotently, to think that other men had her easily when he, who wanted her more than he craved anything else in life, could not have her without the sacrifice of some lingering principles of what we call decency. In time, he felt, those would go; but still he clung to them.

He marched through the woods till the sun made a scarlet sheet back of the bare black trees and the woods began to grow dim and become peopled with evil shadows and dark hollows where witches might dwell. Far off, from the shores of the lake, he could hear a few faint shouts as the last of the skiers quit their play. Purposely he had tired himself in every limb, that sleep might more readily come. It was hideous to lie awake of nights and be tortured by dreams and longings so full of passion that the emptiness of the reality of existence was brought more vividly home to him. He wanted the highest pleasures life could give. He dreamed of them. Yet he hesitated to go about their attainment. The thought that he should go to Esther as other men basely went to her, revolted him and made him feel unclean, as if he had sinned against all womanhood. Sometimes he hated her because she was what she was; then it occurred to him that had she been anything else he would in all probability never have noticed her. But he could not accost her on the street nor go to her home nor be presented to her. Shreds of decency held him from any of these courses. But meet her he must, and would.

Monday came for Esther Pym, cold, blue, heartless, just as she had pictured its coming. Eric went to school. He seemed all right. She went to look for work. She passed Sternberg's. A new girl was there already, at ten o'clock in the morning. The wheels of commerce grind on. Where did one look for work? The restaurants, the hotels—nothing doing. The hotels depended on tourist traffic, which came only in summer. Winter was a dull season for them, they needed no help. Some rich people, the paper said, wanted maids and cooks—with references. It would be useless for Esther Pym to apply. The women, it was always women, usually stout and dignified or young and insolent, who hired maids and cooks—the women would look at her and see that she was a pretty piece, likely to draw a second glance from husband or brother or son, and with no references— "Preposterous, my dear; you could tell in an instant just what she'd be."

Esther knew what she had to face. She stuck at the task doggedly. She was going to be good, but unfortunately you had to eat, keep warm and wear clothes whether you were good or bad. And one must work to have money, unless one's father has done well. So Esther didn't give in, but tried her mightiest for almost a week, until most of the money went to pay rent and

some to buy food and there was none left. All of which was bad enough, but then Eric came home Friday noon, sick in good earnest, fevered, in appalling condition. The plucky little beggar had gone on his nerve all week. He didn't want to lie down and be sick. Much better to coast on the Common with the Rayes and have some fun. But he hadn't been well a day since the Saturday of Esther's departure from Sternberg's. And when he would slide down the hill and shout,

"Look out ahead
For my big sled,"

his head would be so light and dizzy he wouldn't know whether they looked out at all. So he went to bed and a doctor had to be called and Esther had to give up job-hunting, futile pursuit, and tend Eric.

The doctor came, a business-like, callous young doctor, who looked at Eric and gave off a list of ailments, foods, medicines; and pocketed Esther's money though, for all he knew, it might have been, as it really was, practically all she had in the world. No money now to buy fuel, food and medicine. And Eric was mighty sick. Eric would grow worse, perhaps die, if he didn't have the proper food and care, if he wasn't kept warm. And Esther herself had to live. She needed food and warmth.

So why then should the boy not have what he needed to keep him alive and why should not Esther have the wherewithal to buy such things as were necessary to keep body and soul together? Why, there was no argument. One couldn't save one's soul if one's body was dead; without money one's body would surely die; then she must get money. Charity—oh, yes, Charity might help her, official Charity that sits in a swivel-chair and writes down a history of each case of destitution and gets the social backgrounds, the this and that. Charity would surely probe into Esther Pym's past life and raise its brows. What nonsense! This girl is merely giving us a good time. She can get money as she always got it. Anyway, she's not a deserving case. There's Mrs. Murphy, whose husband ran away and left her with ten children, because she tongue-lashed him so. Mrs. Murphy needs assistance more than this hussy.

Esther would not seek Charity. It is, to some natures, much easier to starve than to go a-begging, which may indicate that pride is the virtue of deepest root or again may not. Despair was with her now. The vision of the worthwhile, of a life better, cleaner, was still there, glimmering afar off. But it never had shaped itself out of its vagueness. To be like the women Starr knew, like the Raye girl and those others who went with her, had seemed very desirable to Esther Pym. Even now when she was hungry and the house

was cold and Eric tossed on his troubled bed, it was still desirable. But she could not have her desire, she could not.

So Esther, after the manner of the goddess, turned many things over in her mind, and ended her thinking with a shrug of her graceful shoulders, that said clearly enough, "What's the use? This is too much for me and I'll do what I have to do." But her eyes glinted with old hardness as if the kind warm spirit that had been in her were gone out of her and she was become just venal flesh.

If it weren't for the boy she wouldn't care. But he mustn't die when she could save him very easily. Easily—no, there would be a crucifixion of something good, something that had been born not so long ago, but that had been strongly conceived of the look in a good man's eyes, that had been nurtured by her strong denial of that which was in other men's eyes, and her own firm will to be worthwhile. Crucifixion of that.

In the past there was a man who had given her money. He would do so again. As men go, he wasn't a bad man. He just didn't think much about God and laws and decency and all those objects of virtue that enrich the world. He wasn't an unkind man, nor a brutal one. Still, Esther felt loathing at the thought of going to him, going to any man, to be just a woman. It was rotten to be a woman. Men preyed so, if one was a defenceless woman, poor, in want. It was a mess.

Timidly, in the brazen way of such women, Esther Pym phoned one afternoon to Harper Blythe. It was a long time since she had phoned to Harper Blythe, yet the young man, his secretary, who answered, recognized her voice and there was a mirthful note in his voice. "So you've come back," it said. "They always do. Harper is a devil of a fellow with the girls. They can't leave him alone." This man couldn't know that Esther Pym had eaten just a little bread and drunk black tea that day, that even in the warm telephone-booth in the chemist's shop she was cold and that Harper Blythe was the last person in the world she really wished to see. Anyway, the young man said,

"No, he won't be back. But he's dining at the Athletic Club and you should be able to reach him there."

Esther turned away from the telephone when that was done. She would find Harper Blythe without much trouble. He would leave the club after dinner and just a look from her would suffice. Harper had liked her no end until she had, as he put it, "got queer notions about things, a fine girl like you!" So he'd be delighted to see her again and talk to her with his face

close to hers and his eyes looking into hers with all the sweet tenderness and ardent desire of a big codfish. But then, one must live. Eric must live.

At half past eight Esther Pym walked by the Athletic Club. She knew, almost to the minute, when Blythe would appear. In some things he was as regular and methodical as a fine chronometer. He was a big man, ruddy of face, of the type that clings desperately to youth, wears superfine garments, pays barbers huge sums for massages and knows all the best manicures by their pet names.

Esther was close to the door when it opened. Few people passed in the street. It was very cold, glitteringly cold with starlight sprinkled on the piled up snow. She saw the huge bulk of Harper's raccoon-clad figure. He looked as a Roman senator would have looked if the conscripted fathers, as the schoolboys say, had worn raccoon coats—very tall, stately, affluent.

Esther looked at him, then at the man with him, a slim, dark man in a blue belted coat and grey soft hat pulled low. This was Graham Starr and Esther felt as one who has gone to keep tryst with Lucifer only to find God walking with him. She could then have naught to do with Lucifer.

Harper Blythe's secretary must have informed him of her call. He waved to her cheerily, he called to her; but she held her head high and walked past as if only by chance had she come there. Starr's eyes were upon her, she knew; and Starr was the embodiment of all things right and good. Starr was her god.

CHAPTER IX

So Eric Pym, who would have been a great man or a great rogue, and would have done well either way, died that right might live and Esther, in the dull misery of her grief, told herself that it was worthwhile. He died peacefully enough, the little black-eyed fellow, and those who marked his passing said God was merciful, it was a blessing and he would be better off —all those dear, irritating, ugly, unconsoling things that people will murmur in time of death, when silence would voice a thing far sweeter.

The Reverend Hilary came, which was a mercy, and read prayers over the boy; this just a formality, because Eric had been too young to have done much harm. But Esther liked the prayers. They were very solid and immensely comforting and the minister's mild voice made it all seem so real and true; so certain. Why, looked at that way, Eric was having a much better time where he had gone, what with no cold and no scant food. If only there were lots of other lads to play with.

The Reverend Hilary, from the answers she gave his few questions and from what his clear eyes saw, knew pretty well her state. But he would never know what she had done that night when Harper Blythe called to her. Eric had died because of that. Money would have bought so many things he needed. So, alternately, she felt like a murderess and a holy woman. If Eric had lived, at that price, this good woman, Esther Pym, must have died. She had obeyed the law to the letter; therefore she was not guilty. She had done the right thing, a commendable thing.

The empty place that the boy's gay presence, his laughter, his shrill voice left, slowly filled; closed, rather, as the gums close over the pit left by a tooth drawn. The Reverend Hilary had arranged for the funeral and in so many ways he had aided her. She could sew and embroider and initial things like towels, pillow-cases, napkins, very well. The Reverend Hilary had many rich parishioners who needed such work done, who had daughters about to be married, daughters old-fashioned enough to want pretty embroidered things, but modern enough to be too infernally lazy to do the work themselves. Esther Pym lived from the fruits of her needle.

She left the Rookery and rented a room among respectable people. She felt better, a little exalted. Soon now, people would cease to remember what she had been and she might enjoy the bliss of being ignored. But was ever

woman with beauty such as hers, that beauty which blazes full in a man's eyes, likely to be left alone? There are human flowers that, perchance, do blush unseen, but they aren't usually very striking flowers. Men, though they talk about bonds, gold and royal commissions, still consider women an important item and never yet was a conference so serious that the entry of a really lovely lady didn't cause minds to wander or the agenda to be shelved entirely while the men showed off.

Esther wondered about Starr. Her room was in an old brick house on Pendock Street, no great distance from Hugo Ferrer's, though it was a modest room and cost her only two dollars by the week. So, she often saw Graham Starr pass in the street, pass with that long, quick stride of his, that aloof disregard of everyone about him that was only the masque he wore to disguise his complete consciousness of every man, child or coddy. He was splendid, thought Esther. Something of a prince. She didn't see him with Denise Raye, but to her that signified nothing. She didn't go about much and they might be often together for all she knew. Once, however, she had seen the Raye girl, in a white fur coat, walking with a big man who seemed very happy to be with her. But it was not for a moment to be credited that Denise could prefer this man to Graham Starr.

Esther would honestly have denied that all men were alike; that belief which so many women, very good women married to pretty good husbands, will loudly proclaim, whether or not they truly believe it. No; to Esther there were men and men, good men and bad men. She held to this credo with a childlike and joyous faith. It was her religion. And Starr was the best of all good men. Out of all the hideous reality of man's grossness, animalism and weakness, Esther Pym had emerged an Idealist. Surely, she reasoned well, the world could not go on if all men were like those she had known. It would be terrible to walk in any street and think that every man she met—

The Grassman had an idiot son who ran all day in the street, up and down, across and back, in alleys and out, saying "Silly Eugene and crazy Moll, crazy Moll under the bed. Delockajenar, Delockajenar," and laughing crazily the while. He made horrible grimaces at children, frightening them out of their wits and causing them to scurry at his approach. He was young, but a heavy black beard, like that of a dark-skinned man who has not shaved for weeks, covered his cheek and jowl and, as idiots do, he fingered his lips and chin and smiled vacantly. What he meant by "Silly Eugene and crazy Moll, crazy Moll under the bed. Delockajenar," no one knew; not even the Grassman. The Grassman looked on his son with awe, with neither pity nor

contempt. The Grassman venerated him and gave him very good food to eat and his own good cast-off clothes to wear. The Grassman believed his son was near to the spirit world, to either God or the Devil, and in either case was rather more important than other men's sons.

Hugo Ferrer, who, with his dog, his cane and his pipe, wandered all about the ancient city, knew every one of its queer, quaint characters and indulged in much speculation about them, especially about this crazy boy, the Grassman's son. The Grassman lived in a sort of lane not far from Pendock Street. Hugo knew the family history. He remembered the idiot's grandmother, an old dame who owned a cow. Long, long ago, at sundown it used to be Hugo's delight to go watch her milk that cow, because the milking was accompanied by a weird chant with these words,

O Cow Lady, that's my cow,
Nice Cow Lady, that's my cow.

"It makes her give more milk," said the old crone. Cow and woman had long since gone, but the Grassman lived there yet and from there the idiot boy came and ran up and down Pendock Street to Hugo's supreme gratification.

Hugo showed the boy to Graham Starr one day.

"Yon's a crazy loon," said Hugo. "If I could find what he meant by Delockajenar I think I'd have the secret of life. But no one can find out. Damn it, I've asked the creature's father. 'It's a charm,' says he. A charm—no doubt it's a charm. But see him now."

"Toad!" said Starr. "Dirty little toad."

The Grassman's boy looked like a toad now. He squatted on a stone step. He had a man's head and torso, queerly short and misshapen legs, long arms. And he was black, black like a devil out of hell. He was an obscene thing, sitting there on the stone step, mouthing his rotten words, grinning and fingering his lips wet with drooling spittle.

Starr's face was livid as he watched. Hugo became alarmed.

"What's up? Hey! You look like—as if you were seeing something."

"Could anything be so ugly!" said Starr. "So malformed and ugly and—Why did you show me him?"

"I don't know." Hugo was at a loss. "It's only of late he came up to Pendock Street and ran about and sat on that step."

"Yes, on that step," repeated Starr. It was Esther Pym's step. He had seen Esther behind the curtain; and that lewd image perched itself on her step and mouthed, "Delockajenar, Delockajenar." And the boy's shifty, mad eyes looked at Starr and jeered, jeered.

"Like an image of sin," thought Starr. "A hideous monster. Why don't they put him in a cell? He terrifies people. He's a menace on the streets."

Now in Starr's vision of Esther, the mad thing came too. It watched, leering. It mocked. Once as Starr passed the step of Esther's house and the boy was sitting there, Starr felt a terrible desire to kick him, trample on him and destroy him, that evil basilisk. Starr came to call the creature a basilisk, for he was like a lizard, sitting there on the step in front of the house where Esther lived. It would be sweet to destroy him. He watched. Starr felt that he watched. And one day he pointed at Starr, grinned and said, "Delockajenar!"

Starr cursed the thing under his breath; he hurried away, not looking at the basilisk. If he looked he'd fall on it and surely crush it to a pulp—unless he found it a hard, horny, spiny thing that wouldn't be destroyed, that would fight him and best him and crawl over him.

But behind the curtain was Esther, dark, sweet-faced, strangely pure and ever desirable. And like a hellish mascot that basilisk squatted and sunned itself on the stone step and kept watch. Starr wanted her. Was that awful thing a symbol of his wanting her? Was it ugly to want her, to think of lusting in her? Other men had—

Starr had drifted away from Varick. He didn't get on with Varick now. Not that there was any ill feeling between them; not that. One didn't get angry at Varick and it was hard to imagine Varick taking anyone seriously enough to resent them. They just were embarrassed in each other's presence and Starr did not often go up to Varick's unless it were that Hugo Ferrer and Buller came there to hold discussions. Then he would join them, for the others acted as shock-absorbers for him and Varick.

When he went there and found Varick alone, they laboured for things to say, hunted for things to say. They could feel each other seeking for some good words. It was a wonder they didn't laugh; but no, they took it all very seriously, and studiously they avoided speaking of women, the women who mattered to them.

But this man, mused Starr, as Varick would sit and smoke, not looking at him directly—this man loves Denise. It may be Denise loves him. Denise had once been a small freckled girl in gingham. She had long curls then. Starr remembered her well, a saucy girl; brazen, Hugo Ferrer, would have

said, as a collie-bitch, than which there is nothing more froward or unabashed. Sturdy she was and very determined about things. If she wanted anything, she'd get it if it was by any means possible to get it. She knew things, grown-up things. If she couldn't get what she wanted she'd fly into a rage and fume and scream and hurl things and act generally like a devil until she was utterly spent and broken and dissolved in fevered, uncontrollable weeping. Starr remembered those fits. She hadn't indulged in them for years. She had become more mature and, anyway, she never now wanted anything she could not get. But the devil was there, dormant, in her. Starr knew it. She had beaten him, conquered him in childhood with those sweeping passions of hers that threatened like a tornado to destroy herself and him and all things about. She had dominated him, a very aghast boy whose temper did not often flame, and she had made him resent her.

Perhaps that was why he never hoped to have Denise, never went mad over her. He knew that under her still, cool front, hell could rage and destroy. Sometimes there was steel, glinting, merciless, in her blue eyes and there was a metallic sheen to her hair, and her face, so sweetly winsome, had an old, old wisdom and was hard. No man's fool, thought he; and looked at Varick and wanted to say,

"Dear man, you're at a devilish bad age to go fooling around with dynamite. You don't know Denise. I can't imagine any man exalting himself through Denise. And that's what a man wants to do with a woman—use her as a means to exalt himself, destroy her with his passion, hurt her, subdue her. One couldn't do that with Denise. She's no ordinary woman. She's strong and, moreover, she's straight and hard and not at all sentimental. Your tastes are well suited to hers; but so, too, are mine. Yet I'd never think of having her to wife. If she lay in my arms and said sweet, silly things I'd all the time be thinking of her heaving an empty flower-pot at my head one day in the garden when I crossed her in something. Of course, she's more diplomatic now, but you're a darned big target and someday you surely would scratch her and then—"

But Starr never said anything like that to Varick. He didn't like to, he couldn't; Varick was so happy in her or in himself—no matter.

Varick sang in his rooms often now and in the early morning Starr saw fresh tracks in the snow where Varick had been still earlier abroad. There were signs about Varick that Starr read easily. Varick was in love, and Starr didn't know whether it were in order to weep or rise and give voice to cheers.

Time was when Starr had had visions of Denise Raye; no doubt the same fair vari-coloured visions that this big man, Ian Varick, who was a philosopher, had now. Visions of bliss they were—love's Elysium. But they had passed long since and, Starr knew, they had died, if they ever really lived. They were not such dreams as he now had of Esther Pym. These were gay, drunken dreams he had now—Saturnalian images, Eros amok, aphrodisia. Had he not lived an ascetic life before this woman called Esther Pym came unto him and entered into him and made a fever in his bones and an itching in his flesh? Had he not, even since her coming, stayed back of the unseen barriers of old inhibitions that said: "Thou shalt not commit adultery?" And did he not want her with a terrible longing?

Then what more natural than that he should dream? Men have gone insane for less, men who had the strength of religion, the legion strength of saints, martyrs, holy women and virgins; men who trusted in a strong God. With Starr it was, that held him back—who knows?—some social negation, some shyness, some inferiority he fancied in himself, that would not let him go and possess this woman. He wanted her so. He had dared to dream of having her for all time, even as his wife. Then reason came to him and slew that dream, Esther Pym could not be his wife. There would be no sane, ordered existence, that which marriage is, for him and Esther. One did not take such as her to wife; one had her for a glorious hour—

A glorious hour—he dreamed of that and even as Esther came into his arms, a basilisk, an idiot thing, leaped atop the couch and squatted there and leered at him and said its meaningless word—"Delockajenar." And with that chimeric thing ever-present he could not have his hour. Where did that thing come from? How could it, like a demon conjured up out of the nether abyss, walk upon the earth? And why did it jeer at him?

"You're not too well, my boy," said Hugo Ferrer, looking Starr over with his clear, appraising eyes, making Starr uncomfortable as of old when Hugo had looked at him and by merely looking learned that he had not practiced as was due. "Don't you sleep well? What ails you?"

"Why, nothing," Starr had without trouble built up a splendid system of lies. Never should Hugo Ferrer know that a woman like Esther Pym and an idiot boy had caused him to sleep only in fitful periods from which he would awaken expecting to find a lizard-like thing sprawled on the bed glowering at him from under dead-lidded eyes, intruding upon his hour of passion with a woman's flesh, spoiling it, making it smell with his vile breath that overpowered the fragrance of her and the musk of love. Even Hugo would

say he was a madman and try to hurry him off to a nerve specialist or want him to go under observation as suffering from some dread psychosis.

Sane persons like Hugo and Varick did not suffer like that. The hypersensitiveness, that Hugo had remarked in him, was the reason for it. This idiot boy was nothing to him, nothing to Esther. If he loved Esther and wanted her carnally, the obvious thing was to go and take her and surfeit himself on the beauty he saw in her, recreate himself by his very efforts to destroy it. So he bolstered himself up and strove to go about the business as animal man would go about it, unthinkingly, lustily.

As Harper Blythe had gone about it. That night when in front of the Athletic Club they had met Esther, was a vivid memory to Starr. He had heard Blythe call to her, seen the look of chagrin on the man's puffy face when she passed and failed to answer him. Starr had felt furious against her then. Why had she come there, the—? Blythe had expected her and known the time of her coming. Blythe had sworn viciously when she went away without speaking to him.

"Some kid!" he said to Starr; he was a man quite shameless in his sins, rather delighting in the fact that worthy folk were shocked and appalled by his pagan conduct with women. "She gets into your blood. You could write a book about her, easily; that is, if you could ever get to know her. She puzzles me."

Starr wanted to choke him, the big rotten clown. He had held Esther in his arms, toyed with her, wantoned with her. Bah, his breath reeked always of liquor. Probably he gave her liquor to help drag her down to him. Why did she take up with scum like Harper Blythe; unless she was herself no better?

All that night, the night before Eric Pym died, Starr felt depressed. He was irritable and walked in his study like a beast pent up in its cage. She hadn't dared stop to talk with Blythe when he was around. She knew he was watching her. She wouldn't flaunt her sin in front of his eyes. But did she think he didn't know about her? Did she take him for a fool? He knew what she was up to. Harper Blythe would find her afterwards, go to her, stay with her. Damn Harper Blythe; and her, too, for a wanton woman. The rage of Paphnuce, the righteous rage of Paphnuce who spat in the face of Thaïs on the way to the Thébaïde. He wanted to punish Esther Pym, to torture her for being what she was. But did he?

Esther Pym walked unconscious of the storm she had raised in this man, Starr. A fine, good man he was to her. Much like the Reverend Hilary; not a

base man. He would marry the Raye girl and there would be many children to share the wholesome, clean life of her and him. Splendid that it should be so, thought Esther, seeing him often pass in the street as she sat by her window sewing at initials, and tatting and embroidering lovely silks and linens for the lazy daughters of the rich. Things like these were for the Raye girl, Starr's chosen; beautiful things that were a joy to touch, a delight to see.

Esther deified this man. Once in a book of his she had read about women like herself and men like Harper Blythe: "Beasts—" wrote Starr. "They are less than brute beasts, these men who consort with women whose souls are incarnadined with their shame. And if the men are beasts, the women are their mates."

Oh, scathingly he wrote of such as Esther Pym and his sharp words cut into her and stung and lacerated her. He must think thus of her and despise her. Had not his eyes despised her that night when she walked over the crunchy packed snow past him and Harper Blythe? His eyes had lashed her then and he seemed to say, "You're just an animal, a dirty thing, a cheap thing." And she didn't want him to think of her like that. He must think kindly of her. If he knew that she had not gone to Harper Blythe when going to him meant so much, surely he would think well of her. Why, Eric had died after that, Eric who might have lived. And she had kept good, she knew it now and felt it with strong new pride, because of him, because she wanted to be such as he would have her be; not a beast to consort with beasts. But the price had been high. She had run the gauntlet of Foxy-face and Smiling-face, of Sternberg and Death. It hadn't been pleasant. And Eric was dead. He would have lived a long time, perhaps, if she'd had more money to warm him and put hot food in his little stomach. He enjoyed living, too. He hadn't wanted to die. He had been a good boy, though he knew too many vile words that men who came to see Esther had said. But maybe he didn't know their meanings, and then God wouldn't be harsh with him. Anyway, Esther had let him die and she believed she had done right. The neighbours had helped as much as Charity would have helped. It needed a fair bit of money, such as she could have got through the giving of herself. She had foreborne, and therefore was she sanctified.

The Reverend Hilary came sometimes to see her and take an honest, permissible pride in his handiwork. "I have reclaimed," thought the minister, "this woman from sin. She is happy now. She has good work to do. She makes enough to live. It is a joy to see her so and even were it not the will of God that such as she be drawn from the ways of sin into those which are God's, it would still be a worthwhile thing to have her thus."

But he, kind man, never spoke of the past nor raked in its ashes to see if coals still had fire in them. For him, and he hoped for her, it was dead and might in death forever rest. "She will sin no more," he thought. "God be thanked that I have been the humble instrument of His holy will."

But, Hilary, you were not the High Priest here, whatever you may think. You were not. It was another man, a stranger to the surplice and sacerdotal stole, a young man with a face like a god, to Esther a good man and lover of good women. In this man, how she knew not, Esther saw that which she would like to be. He became her Christ and it was his unspoken teachings, and some he had written in his books, that she obeyed. Because of him she left the ways of shame and became a good woman, because of him she scorned the smiles of many men, and the touch of Meyer Sternberg's fingers on her cheek was a vile touch and made her shudder; though, in truth, it was no more vile than many she had felt before. Because of this young man, Hilary, she let the boy die, even while she believed, even knew, that through her he might be saved. So the glory was not yours, though you believed it so. It was his, but he knew it not. He did not glory in it because he did not know it. He lusted after her.

Varick had long ago ceased to believe in fairy tales and, up to the hour when he saw Denise Raye lying unconscious on the grass where she had been thrown from her car, he had classed love as a fairy tale, an unreal and impossible thing. But, at deep heart, all men are children and believers in fairy fancy. Tomorrow, they love to think, will be different, better, brighter. This love, thought Varick, will not be as other loves nor will I fall into error as I did before. It will be different now. This girl—she is so unlike others—so unlike Eunice.

He never talked to anyone of Eunice. For years he believed he had wronged Eunice. When Starr spoke to him one night of good women and bad, of a fancied distinction between saint and harlot, he had said that a man never forgives a woman, his woman; he condemns readily. He will not listen. Eunice had been his wife.

That was in London during the war, the memorable war that found so many women wanting, yet brought out the noblest, unexpected things in so many more. He left Eunice a few days after he married her, to go back to France. He was a believer in fairy tales then. When, unexpectedly, he returned to Blighty on leave, he ceased to believe in anything. You see, he had rather made a religion of Eunice and men, also women, who will persist

in confusing humanity with deity, flesh with spirit and blood with ichor, are pretty sure to come a cropper.

Delacourt was his friend; that made it a bit worse. Then Eunice had wept, and woman's tears seem to turn everything into a soggy, soaked mire. Varick couldn't stand her weeping. If only she'd brazened it out, bluffed, sworn, done something decent. But to sit down and cry and look helpless and take everything he said; to do nothing but just cry.

He left her and went back rather hoping to meet a soft-nosed bullet or stop in the way of some Cordite. He'd been a bit of a dreamer, Varick; a very boyish fellow who believed in all sorts of old-fashioned things like love and vows, the sacredness of wedlock, the solemnity of a kiss and all that. It came as a shock to him that people who thought themselves intelligent didn't take marriage seriously, looked upon it as much of a lark and certainly an experiment. A chap said once to him, "A hundred years from now, marriage will have been abolished as barbarous." Barbarous, mind you. Varick could have slapped that chap vigorously. The fellow probably had a good mother, maybe said his prayers when he was a child. Barbarous.

The war over, Varick stayed in England only long enough to leave for America. He didn't see Eunice. The divorce was obtained with no trouble. She got it. He didn't care enough about the business and never would have to do with another woman again. "God, she might weep as Eunice had wept, copiously, tears running like brine off a ship's scuppers in a sou'-wester. What a soggy liquid mess that was!"

Then, far away from Eunice and the young man who had prophesied that marriage would soon become a relic of barbarism, joining polygamy and slavery on the dusty shelf of supposed oblivion, Varick had begun to wonder if he hadn't been a little too rough with Eunice, too much the outraged husband, the furious accuser— "Let this wanton woman be scourged, then thrown to the Pekes!"—all that sort of thing. She might have done better. Woman didn't have much of a show. Men went away from their wives and had other women, went back to their wives and thought nothing of the others; would have been wroth if their wives had even insinuated it was wrong not to be faithful. Men were like that. All the sauce for the goose.

Varick steered clear of women. He succumbed slowly even to Denise Raye. He didn't want to expose himself again to a woman's weeping, to heroics on his part, to a friend's acting the pernicious third corner of the old Scalene, Isosceles or whatever it is; probably Scalene, with husband and wife the vertices on the longest side. Varick was wary, yet he found his heart

had still the power of loving and could act erratically in front of a pair of blue eyes. Still, he contained himself all fall and might have pulled through, what with thinking he had been mean to Eunice and should have given her another chance and fearing he'd make a beastly fool of himself again. He might have pulled through if he hadn't gone with Hugo Ferrer one night to Sand Point Slip where the big ships dock.

Hugo went there to see a twenty thousand dollar 'cello come down the gangplank; incidentally, to meet the owner and player of this Midas' fiddle, one Schect, whom Hugo had known in Leipsic when he studied there lang syne. Many people came off the boat. Hugo did not notice Varick's intense curiosity about a florid-faced lady in extravagant clothes who carried one of those absurd mechanical bulldogs that do tricks on the end of a string, and was accompanied by a sad-faced, very bored man who, too, doubtless, did tricks on the end of an invisible cord. This was Delacourt—poor, unhappy Armand. This was Eunice, how she had wept!

Varick stayed well in the background and did not betray himself. He was a happy man. He had pictured Eunice, somehow, as never having ceased to weep. He saw her a Goddess of Sorrow forever letting tears fall, till an ocean of grief was stretching out limitless around her and his own feet were wet and cold with it. Poor Eunice. She looked fat now and very pleased with herself and Armand was paying up for his betrayal of friendship.

Varick bore them no grudge, none whatever. He was sorry for them and would almost have liked to shake hands with them and murmur something such as one says at funerals. They looked as if they needed cheering up. Probably they were going trans-Canada, pent-up in a private car with the mechanical bulldog.

From that moment Varick did not hesitate to let himself fall freely in love. The ghost of weeping Eunice was laid away. Song, tuneful song, was on Varick's lips that night as he rode away in a cab with the opulent 'cello, the wizened-up Schect and Hugo.

Varick and Denise Raye—it would seem they were an ideal pair. So much more certain, more—what would you say?—sane, than Graham Starr was Varick. Mrs. Raye thought so. Other people thought so. Mr. Raye never said what he thought; perhaps he didn't think. But no one said what they thought to Denise. She wasn't the kind of girl one advises or questions or tries to direct. She was free in soul and body. She had money that an odd old uncle had left her after seeing her once in a fit of temper that brought things

in ruins about her. The odd uncle, Milner Farrel, had been suffused with a great awe and admiration.

"What a termagant! What a hell-spitting Fury!" he had said. When he died, he disappointed a score of nearer relatives and left his niece a splendid sum of money. Her clothes were hers, her car, her books, her education. They left her alone. They'd have left her alone, anyway, or she certainly would have left them. She was stubborn. She'd cling to her purpose as a mad thing would, by the hands, by the teeth; let the world tumble down about her. She wanted to be on top of things. She could hate intensely and love unreasonably. She held herself in leash.

Varick was with her a great deal. She liked Varick. Dispassionately, she wondered how it would be to live with him. She was of the little people in this, that it would be necessary to marry officially. One couldn't just go and live with a man. It had to be done decently—big cake with snowy icing and crinkly pink curlicues all over it, rice, old boots, God bless you my children. Then a lifetime with Varick. Things might be worse. He wouldn't be a bore, as most husbands were. He wouldn't make a *hausfrau* out of her. They'd go about a lot, she thought, meet people, live; Varick was like that. She didn't feel any passion for him. Starr awakened some fire in her, some evil gripping force that was like, yet unlike, her fits of temper. Starr had done that the day he spoke of Esther Pym as though he loved Esther Pym. She wondered if she didn't hate Starr for that. Sometimes she thought she loved him and would do some crazy thing with him, tempt him, let herself go and not care what happened. Starr inspired that in her. It wasn't good; it was a feverish thing and made her creepy. But Starr had always been her own property. There had been no other woman.

Varick offered a decent mode of married life. Some children, no doubt. She didn't care for children, and didn't pretend otherwise. She could get to like them, she supposed; funny little things, her children made by Varick. Queer business, having children; so secret, so full of pretence. Everyone tried to seem as if they really believed the baby just came, was delivered like a packet from the draper's. No blood in the having, no agony, no doctors washing their hands, no worry. Other youngsters mustn't know about it. But now-a-days the stork was going the way of the dodo. Youngsters knew better. Youngsters swaggered through life, talked about mature things, made sex the commonplace fact it ought to be; not the alluring secret thing it always was.

Varick loved her. Not long after he had seen Eunice coming down the steep gangplank with the silly mechanical bulldog and the bored Armand,

Varick told her. She thought it wasn't a bad idea, his loving her, and told him so. The believer in fairy tales, for he had become that once more, felt glorified. They sat before the grate fire in the big old living room of the Rayes'. Varick put his arms about her and thought it was splendid. He kissed her. This kiss—it was not in essence a kiss, for once Starr had said something about letting herself go, just not giving a damn. And this kiss didn't make her feel like that.

CHAPTER X

Esther Pym was happy. In heaven, it is said, there is more rejoicing over one repentant sinner than over any number of the just, and in the heart of the repentant one there is a joy that surpasseth what the just can know. She was very glad. She sang at her work and the flashing needle never wearied her long white fingers. It seemed to her that the evil woman that had been, was now no more. There was a mildness in her eyes, a sweet demureness about her mouth. Something of Mona Lisa was in her dark pale face, something of the Madonna, but Ninon de Lenclos smiled there no more.

It seemed to her that the little world where she lived had forgotten the notorious Esther Pym, ceased to despise her, approved mutely of her honest way of life. The Reverend Hilary told her it was sure that the past could be both forgiven and forgotten. "Look ahead," he told her. "Never think of what is gone. The present and the future are all that you need care for. Be strong in the way of rectitude."

She was strong. It didn't seem hard now to stay good. She lived comfortably, secluded, untempted. When thoughts of the past came to her, she fought them away as if they were devils sent to tempt her. The old life had no allure. It was ugly, seen now through the eyes of sanctity. It was unclean. It made her shudder to think she had once lived in terrible sin and walked blindly along unholy ways.

The god that had reclaimed her and caused this great gladness in her, walked often where she might see him, walked past her window. And she looked upon him as the Magdalen looked on the Master, reverently; thought of him as the Magdalen thought, holily; worshipped him purely. She had all his books. She would go hungry to buy his books. In one she read, "All men, contrary to what the cynics may say, look first for purity in a woman and finding it they adore it, for it is a godlike thing that no man, and he be worthy his manhood, would seek to destroy. By it alone is a woman crowned and worthy of man's homage."

She loved that. She was pure now. She had won her crown. She felt that she had fought a hard combat and come through it triumphantly. He had helped her, oh, so much. She wanted him to know what he had done for her, as much by his silence, by his smooth young face, as by his writings, the

reflection of a strong and good spirit. She had made herself the woman he would have her be. He had done a splendid thing.

Unholy fires burned in Graham Starr. Those things, those sententious, Utopian things he had written were lies, all of them. "It's all make-believe," he said in his bitter way, his resentful way, for he warred against so many things. "I said truth should live and virtue flourish and men be like gods—I said them because they seemed the right things to say, because everyone expected them to be said and, hearing them, would smile and cry out, 'Fine! Well spoken! He writes the good word, this man. He agrees with us.'"

But he didn't believe. For him no personal god, no pantheistic god, no any kind of god. A reed blown in the wind was he, for if man have no god, what is he? Yes, there are those who make deities of wealth, convention, respectability, philosophy. They are quiescent; not at war. They have anchorage and do not drift on every current. But this man railed against the unknown things, the baffling things and because life was the only reality he could see he picked on it and tried to find something in it. He tried to write of it and found it strangely unreal. Stories were stories; try as they would to depict life, they failed. There was something in life they couldn't touch. They were what they were—stories. Some men, trying to make them other than what they were, wrote filth; others wrote bombast; others twaddle. Yet they were, no doubt, sincere. He was sincere, but futility was written on the page before ever he put his pen thereto, and he came to hate his work and see in it nothing that could satisfy him.

Passion was a lie, but passion was real. A woman's flesh was real. Perhaps through a woman he could reach some knowledge of the eternal mystery. This one, Esther Pym, who had seized upon him, she offered some teaching. But he told himself wisely he was a fool, the worst kind of fool, to hope for any lasting satisfaction out of a passion that all men shared in common.

He had felt scruples about her. He was fearful about her. He mustn't be. If anything was to be had from her, he must seek for it and let nothing hold him back. And his desire for her grew apace and enslaved him. It was the ruler, he the one who obeyed. He did not know that, the fool; he thought it was at his direction; that it was his passion and he was making the choice. Esther's image haunted him. He dreamed of her and the dreams made new hunger in his waking hours so that there was no peace for him.

The idiot boy, it seemed, as often as he passed, was perched upon her step, crouching there, fingering his loose mouth, looking with furtive,

contemptuous eyes, mocking. The pitiable thing, the filthy inhuman thing, like an image of the most repulsive sin. Why was he there, singing his crazy words, on Esther Pym's doorstep? Why was he always in Starr's dreams of her, spoiling them, blackening them, robbing them of the certain beauty that was their due?

But in spite of him Starr would have Esther. Surely he would have her. Was she not for every man's having? He craved, craved for her and burned for her. He looked towards her window now and saw her gazing at him as she had always gazed at him. It was her eyes that had disturbed him first, looking at him so shyly, so consciously. She had always troubled him. It was her doing. She was inviting him. Well, why not? He was a man and woman was made for him. But he had never known woman. That made him laugh. He wrote so wisely of women, of their sins and virtues, their beauty, their allure; and he knew so little about them at first hand.

Emboldened, he smiled at Esther Pym as she sat there at her window overlooking Pendock Street, where Hugo Ferrer lived, where hundreds of children passed and repassed from school and an imbecile toad ran shouting, "Delockajenar," a word that no man knew. He smiled at Esther and she, seeing that smile, thought a miracle had come to pass; that her god had heard of what she had done, of her having won the crown of virtue, and was pleased with her.

A satyr's smile, to be confused with a shining god's. She was wondrously happy. She was now surely of the elect. That smile had given her kinship with him, a good man, it had made her one with his kind of people, exalted her. In the light of that smile everything she had gone through was worthwhile. The dead child in his grave on the wind-swept hill was no longer a reproach; the hardships, the insults of men from whom she had sought honest work were no longer bitter things. They had all led to this. Her god had smiled.

She watched now more eagerly for his coming. Each day the joy was repeated. He would speak to her, doff his hat at least, if he met her on the street. He would not be ashamed to speak to Esther Pym, because now she was a good woman and worthy of his regard. Perhaps the Reverend Hilary had told him, perhaps Denise Raye had heard of her transformation and had given the news to Starr. It might be that her own thinking of him had made him aware of her. Did he know now that he had played the great part in making her a good woman?

She trembled with the joy of it and life seemed to have given her then of its highest and best. She could ask no more. She thought, "He passes here on his way to Wadham Street, going to see Denise Raye. But he is kind enough to smile at me. Let her have him—his kisses, his embraces—I don't want them. Any man can give them and if one shuts one's eyes— But he gives me so much more."

Starr did not go to see Denise. If he visited anyone it was Hugo. He came to Pendock Street always in the hope of seeing Esther Pym's lovely face peeping from between the curtains of her room. And each time that he passed he wanted her more and each time wondered how he might have her. That he could and would have her he felt sure. But one doesn't take a woman by the hair now-a-days and drag her off as a captive. That was, really, the noblest way of winning a woman. This way Starr would take—

Adroitly, at the Athletic Club, a place frequented by obese lawyers, cranky doctors and tired business men, one night he made Harper Blythe, who surely should know best, tell him of Esther. Blythe was flattered to be allowed to talk with Starr about women. He had read Starr's books and thought their author a devilish smart chap who knew even more about women, if only in a psychological way, than himself.

"Esther's a fine girl," Blythe said, scowling at the cigar he held in his heavily ringed fingers. "A man's woman, if you take my meaning." Starr wanted to kill him, the ponderous piffling rake. "These days," went on Harper Blythe, totally unconscious of the homicidal frame of mind of his listener, feeling as expansive as a politician on a secure platform, "Esther is acting queerly. She'll have nothing to do with me, with any of the boys for that matter. It's all a game. She's stalling us off for something big. Women like her are clever, hard and clever; they got to be. But she doesn't fool me by this trick of staying aloof and pretending to tread the straight and narrow. I know better. A woman like Esther never cares for the straight and narrow. They know too much. Just offer a price attractive enough—"

Starr heard no more. He would not listen. It seemed a dirty business, this of talking about a woman's price. But Harper Blythe knew whereof he spoke. It was nonsense to suppose she had suddenly reformed. The idea appalled Starr. How could she reform? Why should she want to reform? No man would have her now. She had seemed to like the life she led. What, then, was she playing at? Blythe had suspected her to be about some game, looking for something pretty good.

It came to Starr that she was making a play for him. She had always looked at him with those heavy-lidded lustrous eyes of hers. Of late, she had been smiling at him, inviting him. His heart leaped at the thought. He pictured new delights. She wanted him. What else could her smiles mean? They were intended to draw him on.

After that he met Esther's look boldly enough. He said things with his eyes, sinned with his eyes. But she did not read the things he said nor did she dream that sin like that was in him. Heaven in the fullness of its light had been revealed to her. His glances, his smiles, which were sinful, did much to keep her firm on the path of rectitude. There was no guile in her heart towards him. Unselfishly she wished him to be happy with another woman. She did not love him as that other woman must love him. She did not think of the outward show of love with him. It was a repulsive show to her now, for it had been the essence of her old life. A kiss was no sweet precious thing to her, an embrace held nothing of rapture. Let those things be for the Raye girl, not for her. His smile, the good disposition she felt was in his heart towards her—these were what she prized, these made her proud in her own goodness and made her know the serene dignity of womanhood.

While Starr thought on sin—sin with her, sin against her. Voluntarily he would welcome this sin. He was going about it coolly enough. He would make her his. Perhaps he would be tired of her in an hour; then an hour would be enough. But to possess her seemed the most desirable thing in life, to call his this woman whom so many men had cheaply known. Long debate with himself had ended with acceptance of his desire, with acceptance of her.

But how to go about it—? Should he speak to her on the street, so many eyes would see and make of the meeting an occasion for gossip, for scandal from one end of the town to the other. His joy would be embittered before he even had a chance to taste it. Should he go to the house where she was and ask for her, the same would hold true. He was no Harper Blythe to wave his disregard of all convention like a dirty rag in the public's face. He, if people knew he had sinned with her, would have to go hide himself. He could never again walk in the streets.

It was hard enough now. It seemed that people must know his thoughts, must see by a look at him what he was meditating. He fancied they regarded him derisively, suspiciously. But they would not know; they must never know. Even Denise, who would, he thought understand, must never know. She might think he had taken Esther unto himself; she must never be sure. He must be free to deny.

He would not write to her or call her on the telephone. No, he would be tongue-tied. He couldn't say what he wanted to say. He would never be able to put it in words. Some men, no doubt, were skilled in that. Harper Blythe could talk to her in language she would understand. But there must be a way.

He began to watch her movements, unobtrusively. He marked when she was at the window, when absent from it. He saw her leave the house. He followed her at a distance discreetly. She did not know he watched her; no one knew.

Starr felt afraid. A sharp sudden sound would make him jump. He couldn't look at people. He was like a man with a crime on his soul, a crime so awful that he was sure it must show in his face, must be written across his brow. People seeing him, having seen Esther Pym pass ahead, must be saying, "Look at him, at Starr—he's after Esther Pym. He's a bad one, running after her. He always seemed so decent, going about with the Raye girl and consorting with decent people. Now he's after Esther Pym."

Well, damn it, he was. He decided defiantly it was his own business. Let them say, let them think what they would. He was free. He owed nothing to anyone. He could do what he wished as long as it harmed nobody. It wouldn't harm anybody if he went with Esther Pym, if he sinned with Esther Pym—anybody, that is, except himself. Not her—of course, not her. That wouldn't harm Esther, he knew. She was past being harmed—that way.

It impressed itself upon him that he was doing a rather decent thing by going after a woman like Esther, other men weren't so choicy about girls. They took good girls and often ruined them, left them in the most miserable state a man can leave a woman, the most unprotected state. And people—friends, relatives—do not show the gentleness and understanding which all founders of great religions, by precept and example, proved they wished shown to the wretched ones. People—friends and relatives—think only of what they call their own disgrace, what other people will say about them. No opprobrium too great to pile on the woman—daughter, sister, no matter. There is so much of the peasant-mind persisting in the world, so many people who don't have to eat black bread or dig in the mire for roots or starve half the year, yet who are still at heart peasants. Their thoughts are poor, blind things; their thought-life one long mental abortion.

Starr lived among such people; Esther Pym, too, and Denise and Varick and Hugo Ferrer. In their way, these were free; not entirely emancipated, save, no doubt Hugo Ferrer and Varick. Varick had never really belonged to the little people so his emancipation was not from them. It might be that he

had never met anything from which he had to be set free. There was Eunice and the belief in fairy tales— But he had bought a ring for Denise Raye.

Starr had a certain freedom, won and fiercely, militantly maintained. His freedom was more painful than bondage. Stolid, contemptuous, hateful faces were all about Starr. His spirit was a raw thing. People were against him, watching him, hating him. He could not go unmolested. Always something, always people to talk about him, to pry into his business, to be puzzled about what he was doing, to be suspicious. Others passed this over lightly: "Oh, in a small place there's so little to do, one naturally indulges in a bit of gossip." Sometimes it's harmful, often malicious. It may cause girls to cry, men to grow bitter and wonder if there is a god really good to let fat women crucify people over tea-cups while they eat cakes. It does do that. It's a rotten thing, but like so many rotten things it flourishes.

Denise was of all the most free. She was harder than Graham Starr. She was superior; she knew it and gave as good as she got. She laughed crude ignorance into silence, stilled gossip with fierce reprisal. She was good, she could administer a rebuke. No one had anything with which to reproach Denise Raye. Silly, jabbering parrots, these people. She snapped her fingers in their faces.

Esther Pym used to be free; a freedom much like Starr's was hers. She had to fight always; steel herself against the righteous; be brazen, defiant. Now she was in a pleasant bondage to the god of things worthwhile. She had come to value goodness and its concomitant respectability. She had something now to keep up, a dignity to maintain. Starr had smiled at her. She had to be worthy of that. She must continue to be the kind of woman at whom Graham Starr would smile.

She passed him once in the street. She looked at him shyly—a quick, birdlike peep from her big eyes. She found he was looking at her in a kindly way. She was rejoiced; but not thrilled as a woman is thrilled when a man, by looking at her, touches her womanhood and makes her think silly things. She could not know that his meeting her, seeing her so often, was anything but accidental. It was a mercy she didn't know. She went on her way more lightly, more gladly, through the snowy streets where, it seemed, men no longer stared at Esther Pym, women no longer whispered about her. There was a growing pride in Esther, the pride of a good woman, now *sans peur et sans reproche*.

Late one afternoon, when Esther was very glad and felt very good within and the sun was warm on her face and winter seemed to yield to the warm

embraces of spring, she walked towards the Park. There was money in her pocket, money she had earned. The old life was far away. Eric lay peacefully in his grave, his soul happy in the glorious heaven of which the Reverend Hilary spoke. Sin was far away from Esther that day. But when she went out, the idiot boy was on her step and he looked at her, oh, so slyly and leered and mumbled to himself. She didn't mind him. She was happy, for she could not know that an evil thing fell in step with her; but far back so she could not see it. Sin stalked her, but she went blithely along.

Down Jeffrey's Hill she went and across the bridge over the railroad tracks in the Valley and out Mount Pleasant. She just wanted to walk. But out this way Graham Starr lived. She had found his name in the telephone book once and thought, seeing it, how happy she would be to know him; if his telephone number, his address, only mattered to her.

She walked up the slope of Mount Pleasant where a green iron railing guards the street edge and protects one from the danger of falling into the chimneys or through the skylights of the people who dwell below. The sky was pale rose now at sunset and the snow seemed very white and trees very black and the air had that great quiescence which is proper to winter afternoons about sunset time.

Esther walked rapidly past the house where he lived. So that was the house. It was a pretty place, the sort of house you'd expect him to live in. Upstairs or down? She couldn't guess.

Starr, walking far behind her, saw her look at his house and interpreted the act as favourable to him. She looked at him, at his house. She must be interested in him, in his house. He walked faster and his heart moved faster with a reckless beat. The end of the quest, he felt, was near, and all of him was focused on the girl who walked ahead of him.

She was thinner now than she had been. She wore a wine-coloured coat, a jaunty hat. She looked good. Little tan overshoes. She was lovely; a woman, a wise woman, soon to be his woman.

He hesitated to come up with her. Even in the solemnly silent aisles of the Park, where no man was and no eye could see, he lingered behind her and could not find courage.

He thought of Harper Blythe, of the men who sat with her in the Common on summer nights, of the way she used to look at him out of the shadows when he passed. He thought of the softness of her flesh, the red warmth of her lips, the woman of her. And he burned and was emboldened. He came abreast of her. She turned, for the first time aware of his presence.

A blush came to her cheeks, she was uncomfortable, more flustered than he; Esther of a hundred loves.

"You walk far," he said, which was not at all what he wanted to say. He fell in step beside her, looking at her. "You don't mind my company?"

He spoke harshly. His voice had a strange sound to him. Her elbow had brushed his. He trembled, seeing the clear beauty of her profile, seeing her grace in the swing of her hips as she walked, thinking of her, wanting her, already dreaming—

It was a strangely commonplace conversation. It languished quickly and died. Starr could find nothing that when put into words sounded at all sensible. Esther Pym was tongue-tied. She was in heaven. Her god walked beside her. And what does one talk of when one is with God? Not the weather, not the shows, not the neighbours; 'twould be blasphemous to do so.

It was wonderful to have him there beside her. Their silence was not uncomfortable. She glanced at him shyly once or twice. He was looking at the ground with great intentness. Sometimes she felt his gaze upon her, warming her, making her cheeks turn crimson. Yet she did not think, as most girls would think, "Wonder what it would be like if he took me in his arms and kissed me. I wonder if he will." Esther didn't think like that, because she knew very well what it would be like. It would be hell, ugly, false, unglorified. Rather, she thought, "This is paradise, to walk with him. And it's quite all right. He happened to be going my way. He doesn't think of me as the woman I used to be. If he did, he wouldn't walk with me or even notice me. He knows what I've done; that he made me think of better things by writing in his books the passages I read; that I let Eric go rather than fall back into the muck, that I admire him and feel a great pride in his friendship."

But his thoughts were so different, so utterly juxtaposed to the good dispositions she attributed to him. He surrendered to her without a struggle, he desired her without compunction, he thought of how best he could possess her without unpleasantness. It should be easy; she was, he knew, that kind of woman. Harper Blythe had said—

It was almost dark when he suggested that they turn. Esther would have gone on forever, not caring for anything. They turned and he walked briskly, she hurrying to keep up with him. He seemed impatient; tired of her, she feared. But she clung to each moment, for such a time would surely never

come again. It had been a lucky chance for her. She could, she told herself, die happily at this very moment.

The dark came and stars shone out, but there was no moon. Esther stumbled in the ice ruts and he took her arm to steady her. He said nothing. She laughed nervously. She almost wished he hadn't taken her arm, that he wouldn't hold to it when there was no need. A god sustains one's spirit; not one's body.

They came at last in the starry darkness to the gabled house behind the lilac hedges, now bare and scrawny, the big shade trees were ice-bound and naked against the sky. There were no lights in the house.

"If you'll come in," he said with a calm that amazed him, with nonchalance that was a lie to his tingling nerves and racing heart, "If you'll come in I'll have the housekeeper make some tea. I know you have a long way to go and you must be famished. You'll come, won't you?"

Esther, dazed, unable to fathom what it meant, happy, terrified, went with him. Instant suspicion had come to her, only to be choked and downed. He wasn't that kind. He didn't—

In his study a fire burned, making a faint light. He pulled the string of a tall rose-shaded light and lowered the blinds. His movements were quick, nervously quick. He threw off coat and hat, lighted a cigarette, puffed it for a moment, then threw it in among the coals.

"Let me help you off with your coat—" He aided her mechanical movements and flung her coat and hat with his. He stood and gazed into her eyes, he gazed upon her from head to foot and flung his arms about her, kissing her lips, her eyes, hurting her. He dropped to his knees at her feet, embracing her knees, kissing them. He was lost, lost and insane in his passion. He grovelled there like an animal.

He heard her laugh, a hard laugh so lacking in mirth, in anything, that it sobered him even as she fought free of him and kicked him away as the old Esther Pym kicked drunken, importunate beasts in the same hideous posture, away from her.

She stepped aside and behind her in a tall mirror Starr saw a distorted, grimacing, ugly thing with slavering lips, a basilisk thing that mouthed obscenities, like an idiot boy that squatted on Esther Pym's step and said, "Delockajenar." But it was himself.

CHAPTER XI

Esther Pym had wept. Starr, though he hadn't looked at her, knew she was crying when she snatched up her hat and coat; the wine-coloured coat that became her well, and ran from his room. And she had said some queer disjointed things that had made him wonder, made new light flood upon him. He had gone to clasp a warm fleshly thing in his arms and found not that, but something cool, pure; something virgin.

But this was Esther Pym, an easy woman, whom he had brought to his rooms. He had made a last gesture, he had held out money to her, thinking it was just a play, this aloofness of hers. He had offered her money. It was then, he thought, she had started to cry, and sobbed something about trying to be decent, fighting hard to be decent, wanting to be clean, like other women. Doing those things because—why the girl was crazy—she had thought he would like her to be straight. What had made her think that?

Slowly he came out of that strange thwarted mire of passion, slowly the basilisk image in the mirror faded and he became his thinking self there in his room, walled 'round by many books with all those fine things, pictures, rugs, bronzes, his industry had gathered. He sat in a chair by the hearth, his head in his hands and strove to grasp this thing that had happened. He laughed shortly, then ceased to laugh and swore profoundly.

This woman had flouted him, kicked him away from her, cried, said she was good.

"Good," he muttered, "I believe she wasn't lying. It hurt her, my catching her like that. I felt it as soon as I touched her. As if I'd made some rotten suggestion to a good woman, to Denise. That's the way Denise would have acted. But she wouldn't have cried; she'd have raised the devil and torn things up. It would be easier if Esther had acted like that. But she cried. She's probably still crying. She seemed to like me. I thought from the way she acted—"

But, pondering on it all now, he wondered if he had thought rightly. What had she ever done or said that could lead him to think she wanted him, was even willing to have him? Suppose the girl had been trying to be decent. It might have been pride that made her seem so joyous when she was with him. Blythe had said something about her pretending to reform, had said she

was up to some game. Blythe was a fool. He couldn't know. And if she had been trying, honestly, it was a dirty trick that he had done, a caddish trick like kicking a dog that wants to be friendly.

He didn't know what to make of her. He couldn't know her thoughts, her motives, her aspirations. But the fact was there, clean and true—he had expected to find a harlot, and had found instead a saint. That hadn't been acting or pretence, that dazed, stricken horror of hers when he had kissed her.

He sat there, scowled, bit his lip, sulked and felt afraid. The house was empty. There had been no one there, he knew, when he brought Esther in. He had lied casually about the housekeeper. Anything to get Esther, anything to have her for himself. What an upset! What a revelation! And what it had done to him! He didn't want her now, didn't want any woman. Even his passion had sputtered out, a pitiable thing, ignoble, futile. The real Esther Pym interested Starr as the fancied woman of sin had never interested him. He saw her now, spirit divorced from flesh. Flesh was ugly anyway—white, flawless flesh, any kind of flesh. Crazy to think he could find anything to satisfy him in just that.

But what about this girl? She was, he felt, a very good girl, the best he had ever known. He had never seen a woman under like conditions. But she had acted as a vestal would act. She had been outraged, hurt terribly. She had looked on him with eyes that held loathing, big black eyes that he had thought would send their smouldering light blazing into a passion fit to match his. It was, oddly enough, as if it had been Denise Raye he had brought there and embraced and asked to sin with him. He would have expected Esther's reaction from Denise; for Denise was a good woman, not to be insulted thus.

And that ugly thing he had seen kneeling on the floor, grovelling on the floor before the mirror—He knew why he had hated the Grassman's idiot son, who squatted on Esther Pym's step and fingered his wet loose mouth and said meaningless words. He had hated the basilisk because it was an image of what was in himself, an ugly repulsive lizard-like beast. He must have looked like that to Esther Pym. She had kicked him aside as he had wanted to kick the idiot boy who was an offence against decency.

He didn't know much about women. Here, for months and months he had been giving this girl a character which in the showdown was not hers at all. He had fought against the image of her, held back by old inhibitions that said he must not think of her because she was a bad woman. He remembered

he had cursed her when she used to force herself upon his thoughts, when he used to imagine her presence in his room, standing below the lights, hands on swelling hips, breasts small and rounded, lips scarlet as sin.

She had stood there in reality, so different, so remote from his concept of her. She had proved him a fool, yet he did not hate or revile her. He suffered a paralysis of mind. It was all too much to be quickly comprehended. She had said something about Eric. Who was Eric? Oh, that little curly fellow who had black eyes, who looked like her; everybody said he was her son. But she had spoken as if the boy were dead. Starr hadn't heard about that. And why should she have spoken about it then? She had seemed to blame him for a lot more than just affronting her. She had acted as if he had done her an irreparable wrong.

"What the devil!" he said again, feeling his futility. "It's got me beat. I didn't dream I was bucking up against anything like that. If she'd only stopped and talked coherently, told me what I'd done. I'm no worse than those other men she was with, no worse than Harper Blythe—" It gave him a bad taste in the mouth to compare himself with Blythe, pudgy blackguard. But why had Esther Pym accepted men like that with a gay smile and wept like a child when he wanted her?

It came to him that the woman who had run from him was not the same as she who had been the plaything of Harper Blythe. A chameleon creature, woman; now this, now that; now brazen, now dissolved in tears. You never knew when you had them. It had never once occurred to him that this could happen, that she would be anything other than kind to him.

The clock chimed seven, its strokes echoing with a lonely sound in the shadows. No one in the house. He wished someone would come, someone who would talk about commonplace things, hockey, books, dogs. If Hugo would happen along, or Varick. But Hugo would be at his fireside now reading Pepys and pausing with glee as he read of the bellman's passing along the silent street in the lone watches of the night. Hugo loved that little touch. He had composed a fantastic morceau on that theme of the bellman, a series of showering, silver cords that made one's flesh prickle on the spine. And they returned in a boat, Pepys said, "with a dog the King loved." Hugo doted on that—"a dog the King loved." For what better, in truth, could the King find to love than a dog? Not a woman. Starr laughed. Surely not a woman!

Varick wouldn't come. He was with Denise. He spent most of his time with Denise. That was good—to woo and win Denise Raye, to solicit her

hand in marriage—good Victorian style—to lead her before God's altar and say the most beautiful and most meaningless words in the world. So thought Graham Starr. Life was all lies and chicane; all so unreal. Nothing ever came near to fulfillment. Varick dreamed of supreme happiness with Denise. That firebrand. Varick had never seen her in a tantrum as Starr had, away back. Yes, Varick would find her wonderfully sweet, till someday she'd want something that he didn't think she could have. Then Varick would see things he'd never seen before. Starr would wager that readily.

He heard a car turn in through the gateway in the lilac hedge. Perhaps this was relief, someone who would bring the good old world back from its topsy-turvy acting. If it wasn't someone for him he'd go out and walk among the people on the street, mix with the people and find distraction among them. He couldn't be alone. It was rotten sitting there alone with unpleasant thoughts of what he had done to himself. A fellow couldn't go on that way. It was enough to drive one crazy, picturing that girl, the way she had acted in his room; not at all as she was supposed to act. And all those mad, deliriously mad, dreams he had enjoyed of her. A splendid fever, ending in a douche of ice water. Ludicrous, viewed one way; very wrong and startling and pathetic when one thought of her crying and saying incomprehensible things about being decent and clean. How could she be clean? Oh well, people took mud baths to make their skin clean.

The bell tinkled shortly. He jumped up, relieved. It would be good now to meet someone who would act in ordinary conventional style, who would talk things over and help him quiet the jangling of his nerves. He was too sensitive. He should laugh, get a bit of fun out of this near-adventure with Esther Pym. That was the way to take it. But he couldn't laugh. It had been a shock to his sensitiveness. It had hurt. He couldn't stand hurts like that. They unmanned him, set him back, made him more afraid of life.

He opened the door. A woman stood on the verandah just beyond the wide dim shaft of light that came out. For a moment he thought it was Esther. He thought instantaneously, "I'll send her away. I can laugh at her now. I don't want her. I don't want any woman."

"Hello, Gray."

It was Denise Raye. She had never come before, never come near his rooms. She had been curious about the place where he lived, but she wouldn't enter it. That wasn't done. She must be looking for Varick.

"Can't you speak?" she asked, softly, liltingly. It was a dangerous tone. He wondered, and his fingers twisted nervously on the cold knob. She had

come into the light now. A grey squirrel coat was wrapped close about her trim solid form, it came high to her chin, her felt hat was pulled low over her eyes so that they looked narrow and slanty. But she was lovely. Starr had always been proud to admit she was lovely. But not warmly human, not too human; a very sane and cool-headed girl, Denise.

"Why, I'm glad to see you. It makes long time we don't meet," he said smiling. "I suppose you're looking for Varick."

She laughed again and Starr, frankly puzzled, gazed at her intently.

"I'm not looking for Varick. Aren't you going to ask me in?"

She walked past him, through the hall and into the big room where the fire burned and shone with metallic light on the glass of the bookshelves, where Esther Pym had been, where a tall mirror was, that had the magic property of showing a man his soul.

Starr followed her. She paused before the mirror and threw open her coat. Automatically, he came to help her off with it. She removed her hat and with a careless fling of her hand ruffled out her hair until it glinted and gleamed with lights that came and went. She looked at him steadily and laughed with that lilting, running note in her laughter that he had detected in her voice.

She sat on a Chesterfield that faced the hearth. She looked ridiculously small and slight when she sank back among the cushions.

"You're awfully tongue-tied, Gray," she chided. "Won't you come and sit beside me? Give me a cigarette? Be sociable? You're the host, you know, however unexpected the guest."

"Pardon me if I fail in hospitality, Denise," he hastened to obey. "You see, you've never come here before and—"

When her hand reached for the cigarette he had lighted for her he noticed that she wore no ring, not Varick's ring that should have been there. Her fingers were bare. That startled him. She knew it startled him. There was challenge in her eyes, sleepy-lidded eyes, long-lashed with lashes of gold; beneath them the blue was soft as a Caribbean sky.

"You've broken with Varick." There was accusation in the way he said it. Varick was a good man. This would hurt him. It had been good for Varick to love her. It had made him sing and walk abroad in the snow to see the sun come lazily up from the east casting off its coloured robes, making the world seem clean, a fine place for one who loved.

"What of it?" Denise was nonchalant, but her eyes had narrowed as if she sensed the accusal in his voice and resented it. Denise was quick to resent things like that, things that in any way rebuked her.

"It wasn't—real," she continued. "It was a bloodless business, a cold affair. Love is not bloodless, not cold."

"You speak a different language now." Starr found himself very calm, undisturbed by her proximity. She was not Denise now, not the old Denise; she was woman, full of woman's ancient lure, which is a lying thing, which he did not trust. He smiled tranquilly and Denise shrugged with growing impatience.

"I feel—different," she said. It was almost a whisper. Her shoulder pressed close to his, her eyes sought his. He met her gaze easily. "Don't you care, Gray? You wanted me once. I've always—"

Her face was raised to his, her head upon his shoulder. She moved close to him and he knew that the fires, so long dormant, blazed high.

"I came to you," she said, her fingers touching his cheek. "I couldn't stay away any longer. I tried to tell myself I didn't care for you—like that; didn't want your arms about me. But now!—You understand me, Gray. I want you. I want to give myself—"

His hand covered her lips; he released himself from her, roughly. They stood up. All the softness went out of her face, the languor from her body. He saw her teeth, small, cruel, pointed teeth, as her lip drew back. He saw swift fury leap into her eyes.

"You don't want me. You'd rather play around with that rotten street-woman. I know. You prefer Esther Pym to me. You wouldn't turn from her like that. I offered you something clean, something I thought was good—"

"Nothing cleaner, nothing better than Esther Pym could offer," he said coldly. "Don't act the tigress. I don't love you, Denise. Anyway this is not love; it's just a madness that's got hold of you. I'd be less than a man if I took advantage of it. You're not yourself. Go back to Varick, he's—"

"I hate Varick," she said venomously. "Love in a cottage, with a lot of kids. I'll never marry him. He's off now, playing music with his friends. I hoped, I dreamed you cared enough for me. But this woman's in your blood. I hate her. I've always despised her and I despise you. She pretends to be good now. Mr. Rhodes told me. Oh, she's very good. I know how good. She's been here tonight, there's perfume— You can't deny she's been here."

"Have it your own way. She's been here."

"And she's nothing but—"

"You don't know. Anyway, my dear," he said, "you have the soul of a harlot or you wouldn't have come here tonight. You don't give yourself for gain but if I feigned love for you, where would be the difference?"

He could have hurt her, angered her no more, if he had struck her. She raged, but Starr did not rise to her fury. He remained cool. This was the true Denise, this burning, vixenish girl whose eyes snapped hatred of him, of anyone who stood in the way of her desire.

"I—you say I have the soul of a harlot!" Her laughter jarred upon him. "Let me kneel at thy feet, O Christ, and be forgiven," she cried mockingly. "You talk to me like that when you run after a woman not fit for decent people to walk on."

She snatched her coat from the chair where he had laid it; her hat.

"Go to her then," she said. "You fit with her. Dirty—you're both that. I fooled myself into thinking I loved you—loved—"

"Wait—just a minute!"

He tried to hold her. As well try to hold a whirlwind. She tore her arm from his clasp and ran. He did not follow. He stood there before the mirror, his face anguished. "Poor kid," he muttered. "I was rough with her. But I couldn't—couldn't— Oh, damn it all, anyway!"

He heard the car start with a roar that matched the quivering, frenzied anger of the girl who drove it. Its lights cut down through the darkness of the Mount.

"Crazy to drive like that," he said, watching from the window. "Even with chains. The roads are a glare of ice. The little fiend will get smashed up if she doesn't look out. But what a mess! She doesn't want me. It's just that she thought someone else was getting what belonged to her. I'll ask her to marry me. I'd marry her gladly if it would soothe her. Probably I'd be in hot water ever after; but even so—"

They had come there—a bad woman, a good woman. One who was a harlot; another who was, he had thought, a saint. One who had sinned times without number, who had wept when the old sin offered itself to her; the other, who had lived clean, who was virgin, but had acted like a madwoman because he would not have her. It was incongruous. It was ugly, he thought. It stripped life too bare. Two women should not contradict each other like

that. And where, if at all, had love entered into the matter? With him it was passion, carnal and trivial; with Denise it was that, perhaps, and jealousy and selfishness. But with Esther Pym— She had cried and gone weeping on her way. She, whom Denise and all good folk despised as a wanton, had proved the best and strongest of them all.

He wondered where she had gone. Her sorrow would be harder to assuage than the Raye girl's anger. He had heard of women like Esther slipping back when that which had held them on the right road was taken away from them. Somehow he knew it had been taken away from her. He had taken it away from her. What would she do now? Harper Blythe, other vultures, waited for her to come within reach of their talons. Would she resist now or would she give herself with a hard little laugh and say, "What's the use trying to be decent! Nobody's decent; not the people you thought were decent. What do I care?" She might do that; he had driven her to it. He had made the road hard for her.

Denise Raye's fury would burn itself out by its very intensity; not so Esther's sorrow. Sorrow lingers longer than rage. It requires more to appease it; it seeks oblivion and Esther would find oblivion by going back to her old ways. It would be a pity. She had made something of herself, something good and straight. And he had killed that ruthlessly. Denise thought like Harper Blythe—Esther was only pretending to be good. Denise believed she had cut out other men to keep herself for him. It was too droll. If only Denise had waited he would have told her, explained and made her believe.

Poor Varick! He knew how that had ended; in a blaze of anything but glory. Hard for a chap who had dreamed that fairies still lived. It would take Varick a long time to get over that. Only on the surface had their union promised well. Denise was all fire. That guileless, chill exterior—a frigid goddess—Starr laughed. If he had given into her she'd have possessed him ever after, body and soul. Worship of her might last for a while, but it would be only servitude. She wanted to grasp the world in her two small hands, hold it all there. She wanted him like that. He knew. He had no illusions about her loving him. It was more the instinct to possess than the urge to give herself to him.

She had been sure of winning, otherwise she had never risked defeat. He marvelled that she had not struck him, left at least a few minor scratches on his face. It had been phenomenal, how quickly she changed from a purring, playful thing to a wild little animal that fought in a haze and wanted to destroy. That spell would last, he calculated calmly, for a few hours at most.

Then she'd go limp and cry and be very tired and sleep. In the morning she'd present a serene front to the world, but to him never.

Denise drove down Mount Pleasant, across the iron bridge in the Valley up the steep slope of Jeffrey's Hill on the farther side. She drove like mad. At the crossings, people scampered, men scowled and cursed; women raved and were not at all choicy about the things they would like to have done to this madcap girl who never deigned to glance at them. She would kill someone, they said, driving that way, and the roads so slippery. What were the policemen doing to let anybody drive a car like that? But no one seemed to know just what the policemen were doing.

Denise drove like that because it relieved her a little. When she left Starr's room, when she started the car, there had been a reddish haze before her eyes, a bloody haze. She wanted to break and destroy things, kill someone—Esther Pym, Starr, Varick. It would be very gratifying just then to see someone writhing in their death agony. That any man, least of all, Graham Starr, should refuse her, treat her so shamefully, compare her to this girl of the streets, at whom good people laughed, whom she from her window had seen moving into Wadham Street, and had ridiculed! This girl, who was unclean, something out of the gutter—Starr tacitly defended her and took her part. He loved Esther Pym so well he had flouted a good woman. Were men such fools?

Denise had deceived herself too long. Her friendship with Varick, his good qualities, the kisses she had let him take, the solid ring he had put upon her finger, meant nothing that could make up for the loss of Graham Starr. Varick's pictures of their life together made her weary. Surely life held a bigger thrill than this rather prosaic prospect of marrying a man and settling down to the business of rearing a family. There was something more, she knew, something a bit mad and alluring and forbidden, something that didn't take reckoning of convention and formalities and cut-and-dried matrimonial procedure.

Starr's words stuck in her mind—"Let yourself go, just not giving a damn." They stuck and stayed there, haunting her delightfully, tempting her, making her think always of him who had said them. Nothing commonplace or unsatisfying about Starr's love. He knew, she thought, too much for that. A woman just couldn't be bored with Starr. Perhaps, she conceded, he wouldn't make much of a husband, but as a lover he'd have no peer.

Thinking so much of Starr, made more hungry because he neglected her, she thought less of Varick and became surfeited with his wholesomeness. Women, 'tis said, like a little of the devil in a man; some like a whole lot and Lucifer if he came on earth would never remain a celibate. Starr had always held a fascination for Denise. Unconsciously she emulated him in thought and speech. She read what he would read. She had thought that no element of defeat was in her act of surrender to him. He would welcome her and together they would explore the untrodden heights or depths of passion, whichever way one looks at it.

His refusal, his curt dismissal of her was the biggest thwarting life had ever given her. It was a stinging slap to her on whom no hand ever had been laid. Untamed, untrammelled, it drove her to madness as the whip does the wild pony of the plains. She had showed Starr only the prelude of her passion. She trembled and her face, clouded with rage, was not beautiful.

The car raced through the city streets, its chains tearing out chunks of ice, sending a stinging shower into the faces of those who passed near. People turned to stare and marvel at her progress. She must be drunk or crazy, they said. She drove out of the city and around it. The queer fancy of another day returned to her now and she welcomed it with wild exultation. Esther Pym walked in the frozen roads before her and she was riding down on Esther Pym, the wheels were passing over Esther's lovely, sinful body, grinding it into the white ice, making the ice bloody. Blood stains on the white ice. Esther Pym's blood; and her body broken and mangled. Serve her right, the sneaking, black-eyed thing, tempting men away from the women who were fit to be with them, spoiling a decent girl's love, parading her sin for all to see, laughing at good women because she had them at a disadvantage, because she could boldly get men whose asking they had patiently to await. It would be heaven to destroy Esther Pym.

But Esther Pym stayed always ahead of the flying beast of steel and never looked over her shoulder, fearful of its approach. Esther walked on, tauntingly, indifferently, as she had before. But this time she'd be caught, this time she couldn't escape. She deserved to die, to have the life crushed out of her. Denise would laugh to see her lying there, all blood and torn clothes and twisted limbs on the ice of the road.

That insane fancy persisted with the white-faced girl whose hands clutched the wheel as if they were fused with it. The fancy persisted until she had come again into the city streets, into Pendock Street where the lights burned dimly, shone dimly on old brick houses and few people passed. At Wadham Street corner the car turned in, slewed wildly, shot ahead. In the

glare of its lamps a girl in a wine-coloured coat that became her well, showed up clear and straight for an instant. Then the wheels passed over.

CHAPTER XII

So there was crimson spattered on the white ice of Wadham Street at the foot of the old wooden steps with their green iron railing that lead down from the Common. People came a-running, conjured up from out the night —curious, quiet people who stared in horror at the broken body of Esther Pym, at the girl who stood above her, whose eyes looked with an unseeing stare into nothingness.

Presently a man knelt by Esther Pym and put his head to her breast and listened and grunted. A bell clanged far up Pendock Street, its sound coming nearer and nearer, ominous, alarming, fatal. The long grey shape of the ambulance drew up beside the crowd gathered in the roadway. A policeman with a note-book wrote down names and looked very judicial. He said something about "a technical charge of manslaughter." A woman spoke up. She had witnessed the accident from afar. The car hadn't seemed to be going very fast. It had slewed on the ice. Denise Raye said nothing. The policeman drove her car down the block to her home. She would not get into it. Fire had gone out of her. Esther Pym would die. The man who had grunted, after placing his ear to Esther's breast, was a doctor. "No chance," he had said afterwards. "Not one in a million."

It hadn't been sweet to see Esther Pym lying there when the car had passed over her body. It had been horrible, her body under the huge wheels, the juggernaut, crushing her beneath it, smashing her. She seemed, Denise thought when power of thought returned to her, when she was in her room— she seemed to have come from nowhere, to have loomed up in the middle of Wadham Street, in front of the car. That was God's truth—what the woman said. She hadn't been driving fast then. Nearing home, she had slowed, wondering if she really wanted to go home, if she shouldn't drive around some more to cool her fever. She hadn't been trembling then, nor had there been a haze, before her eyes. Seeing Esther Pym in the road before her she had waged an instant warfare with the devil in her that urged her to destroy this woman, stealer of happiness. And the outcome of that short struggle was that she jammed on the brakes, tried to stop the destroying beast. It had been too late for that. She covered her eyes with her hands when she thought now how it had been too late, when she saw again that ruined body on the stained ice of Wadham Street.

She could see the place from her window, barely see it. An arc light sent dim wavering circles almost out to the spot where they had found Esther. Two small figures were there now, little gnomes—Diarmid and Pat, out till all hours because of this excitement, speculating on the how and why, mentioning Eric, whom they had liked right well in an amused sort of way. He swore so much, but underneath it all he was a good lad.

What sense was there in standing to look at dark red splotches on the ice? Denise wished they'd go away. Then Diarmid went to the snow banked up by the sidewalk, brought back two powdery lumps and threw them over the spot. Why had he done that? Did he not like the sight of it? Had Pat told him to do it? To Denise it seemed like a burial, a play-burial indulged in by children if ever they played a game so macabre. Denise was glad when the twain walked down Wadham Street, Diarmid's stout arm flung across the wriggly shoulders of the girl, talking earnestly.

Denise flung herself on the couch. A radiator vibrated, annoying her. Silence like at the dawn of creation was what she wanted, a great silence and solitude. She tried to be level-headed now, to think this out calmly, to justify herself if she could. Had it been her fault the girl was killed? Would Esther live long enough to blame her, to say she was a murderess and had deliberately tried to kill. Hours before it happened, Denise thought with a shudder, she had wished for its happening, she had visualized and prayed for its enactment. Her prayers had been granted speedily, completely. She was guilty. She had driven as she had no right to drive. If, at that moment, she had not been going fast, it was only so by chance. But at the last minute, as she saw Esther there, she had not wanted to kill her; she had tried to stop. Did that remove her guilt. The assassin as his knife descends may discover he is destroying one he loves, but the force of the lunge will carry him on. He is a murderer. The crime was committed in his heart, as in her mind it had been committed long, long before. She had hated Esther Pym and wished the woman off the earth.

About two hours after the ambulance had gone its clanging way up Pendock Street towards the hospital, the telephone on Denise Raye's table rang. Esther Pym was dead. They thought it only right to tell her. Esther Pym had lived long enough to say it was not the Raye girl's fault. She had known it was Denise. She wanted Denise not to worry about it, not to think any blame was to be laid at her door.

Denise was not relieved. How could the woman know what had been her thoughts when she drove the car that night? Esther Pym didn't know she was hated as Denise had hated her. No one would blame Denise, especially when

they knew the woman who had died. “Esther Pym, she was a bad egg. Maybe she had been drinking; women like her do drink, my dear. And Denise is terribly upset about it. She needn’t be; no one else is shedding any tears, though they do say the girl hadn’t been so bad of late.”

That wouldn’t help Denise to forget she had thought of killing this girl and had hated her. Starr would wonder about it, though he would never say anything. What would he think about it? He’d blame her, say to himself that she was glad Esther was off the earth. He would lament Esther more than he would have lamented her. That hurt. He’d never come back to her. She would never want him back, any more than she would want Varick. She had been disappointed in Varick. It would have been tolerable, she had believed, to roam around the world with him, to see strange places and peoples. But he’d had enough of that, he told her. He didn’t want to drift about all his days. When he married he thought of settling down. That didn’t appeal to her—stuck in the same place, with the same man; getting fat, blowsy, in course of time; stagnating.

She didn’t sleep that night; Esther Pym was too much with her—Esther in the cheap seal sacque, Esther in the wine-coloured coat, Esther in a winding sheet lying white and still in the hospital bed. She would never forget. She had killed Esther. She would not be punished, for no one knew that she hated Esther Pym and wanted to see her dead. Her own remorse would be the punishment. That marred, bleeding thing in the roadway—she wouldn’t forget it. She’d never pass that part of Wadham Street, by the steps that led to the Common, never pass it but she’d remember that she had killed Esther Pym there, run her down so that, on looking back, Esther’s image did not still walk tauntingly behind her, but lay there, grotesquely sprawled and twisted.

Thoughts tortured her. Starr came often into her thoughts. She saw him grieving over the body of Esther Pym, holding her dead hands, chafing them, seeking to draw her back into life that she might be his. And Denise was not glad then that Esther could never come back, even should she have him. Varick came and looked at her, piteously, as he had looked when she turned upon him and flung the silly ring back at him. Almost ludicrous he had looked, his big ruddy face paling, his eyes showing disbelief, slow disillusionment. What did he expect? She hadn’t loved him. She had loved Starr. She didn’t love anyone. Love was a sorry thing, a contrary, exasperating thing. You loved where you weren’t beloved, wanted a man who would have none of you, who told you to be about your business.

The little people would talk now, when she ceased to go with Varick and they learned she would never marry him. They'd laugh and say the usual unkind things. But they wouldn't know the whole truth of the matter. No, thank God, they wouldn't associate Esther Pym with her as having both loved Graham Starr. It was a mercy they didn't know that. But what did she care? She wouldn't stay here any longer. This place, this little place that walled one in so—she hated it. One was walled about by hate, envy, gossip, injustice. Everybody waited for your downfall, waited like the crows for corbel's fee. She knew Varick wouldn't stay. He had said he was going to England. There had been just the faintest tone of hope in his voice when he said that, as if he thought England would afford him some solace.

The Reverend Hilary Rhodes sat in his study and smoked a corncob pipe. A simple man was the Reverend Hilary, a godly, lovable, utterly gentle and flawless soul was this good man of God. Books were all about him, not all religious books. He wasn't afraid to look on life, every part of life. It didn't hurt him, but there were some things that gave him pause, that he could understand, yet not understand. There had never been a great passion in the Reverend Hilary's life. His courtship and subsequent marriage was chaste, idyllic, serene. His family was a holy family.

His grave face was more serious still this afternoon of February, a sunny afternoon; its heat thawed the ice only to have it unkindly frozen again by the wind that blew from the north-east, from the boreal places of Belle Isle. But boys played marbles in the streets. He could see them from the big bay-window of his study and to see them made him smile. It was a sure sign of spring, the boys getting down on one knee to do their sharpshooting, getting on their feet to wrangle, school-bags slung over their shoulders.

The Reverend Hilary loved boys and girls, young things. People were always young to him, children. He loved to think of a world full of children, bad children, disobedient, sinful—no matter. Sins were just the grown-up faults of childhood and if one considered men and women as children, in proportion their sins were children's offences.

This young man who had come to him was a troubled child—a lost, despairing, crying child. The Reverend Hilary had put an arm about his shoulders and been very much a man with him.

"Buck up, Starr," he had said. The Reverend Hilary had taken his A.B. from Brasenose. He had been around. Yet he was as good a man as he showed himself. No trick about him, not a particle of wolf in his sheep's

clothing. “Life may be, as you say, a mess just now. It won’t remain like that. You seem to have hit bedrock. You can’t go any farther. You’ll have to come up. This girl you are talking about—Esther Pym—”

“I killed her soul,” said Starr. A few weeks had aged him. His face wasn’t so youthful. One noticed now that the grey in the dark hair at his temples was very marked. The Reverend Hilary had seen him standing by the body of Esther Pym. The minister knew when a man was crying, though no tears came and the mouth was firm. He had come close to Starr, knowing him because he had known his parents.

“Why do you cry?” he had asked.

Starr hadn’t answered then, but he had accepted the goodman’s invitation to visit with him in the glebe, and after weeks had passed since Esther Pym was laid in her grave beside the little boy, he had come. It was torture for Starr to feel men’s eyes upon him; though no one knew the part he had played in the life of Esther Pym. Even the Reverend Hilary did not know, for he said,

“She was well prepared to go. She had nothing to fear from the Just Judge: she was a good woman. Months ago the light of God came to her. It was as if she had touched the hem of His garment and had been made clean. I know from the few things she said just before she died as well as from what I observed, just what she had to contend with. It was anything but easy for her to obey. But she fought gloriously. She was trying for something worthwhile, she said, and thought she had found it in this life. Before she went, she confessed to have failed in finding it here, but she believed, she knew, that she would find it in death.”

“In death, yes,” said Starr, vaguely. He didn’t know, but he wanted to think she’d find it there. Bit-by-bit, he had learned about Esther Pym, about the splendid things she had done to keep herself decent. He knew she had done them because of him. And he had failed her, whom she considered to be the best of all men. That crucified him and purged him, sweated some toxic thing from his spirit and gave him new heart. Poor girl, poor Esther.

Haltingly, he told the minister what he had done. It was good to tell. He had to tell. But he felt the shame of it. Put in bare words, in forthright words such as he was wont to use, it sounded badly. It was very bad and ugly. He could not look at the Reverend Hilary, but he knew the minister’s face was not overcast. When he looked, when his speech was done and there was a long silence, the Reverend Hilary was staring out the window watching the boys, still at their play of marbles. What his thoughts were Starr could not

guess. But what had Esther told him?—That she had failed to find the worthwhile thing in life. He knew she had looked to find it in him.

The minister said, "Don't take it too seriously. She wasn't afraid to die. She seemed glad to be out of it. Life, you see, didn't hold so much for her. You pitied her after she had fled from you, but you would not have tried to make things right with her?"

Starr shook his head. He had pondered that well. If Esther Pym had lived he would never again have seen her. He had planned to go away, had been ready to go when the morning papers told him of her death.

"There was nothing I could do," he said. "I knew I had done something, smashed something into shards. I could never pick them up and put them together. She did not want to see me again. I could not have faced her."

"No," agreed the Reverend Hilary, after a moment's thought. "Not very well. It was done. But this won't break you, won't make you give up?"

"Time will tell me that. I've been fool enough to go my own drive, without reckoning of those whose directions will cross with mine, suffering the fate of a man who tries to swim straight across a rapid current, thinking he'll reach the farther bank at a point directly opposite. I'm going away from here. I don't know where; only it will be some place where it's very quiet all day long, where, if there are others, they won't look at me with questing eyes that are unkind. I'll always be afraid of life. I always have been."

The minister opened his lips to speak, saw it would be futile, this man would not kneel at God's feet and lose himself in worship. Life would hurt him, bruise him, because he tried to face it and would not or could not take the means of flight that were offered to him.

The Reverend Hilary thought of Starr now because of the girl who was coming to see him. They had been often together, Denise Raye and Starr. He had seen them often, walking strongly through the streets, so young, so childlike to his kind eyes. So many people came to him. Denise had driven the car that put an end to Esther's life. Denise and Starr had been close together from childhood. He remembered them when they were very young, coming to his church.

He had been kind to Starr, kinder than the young man would ever know. Only to the Reverend Hilary had Esther Pym in those last moments bared her heart. And Hilary had waited for Denise Raye's coming. If she had not come, he might have gone to her. Seeing her troubled, he might have spoken to her. But that which he had to say he did not wish to say. He was an

understanding soul. Those who listened to his preaching, who marvelled at his plainness, would have stood aghast could they have seen into the heart of him. Much like the Man he served was the Reverend Hilary; and so few people understand Christ.

Denise sat in the chair where Graham Starr had sat. Very slender was she, very pale and lovely and blue of eye. He knew that misery weighed on her heart. He blamed himself.

"My dear," he stayed her words, "I know why you have come. Because of the unfortunate girl who was struck by your car. The memory of it weighs on you—"

"I killed her," said Denise suddenly, uncontrollably. Many times in the weeks that had passed since then, she had thought she would cry that out to the world, to the people around her. It had haunted her like that. Everyone took it so casually—"an unfortunate accident—not at all your fault—sorry, my dear—" The fools! They didn't know. She could have said to them, "I murdered that girl, do you know? I wanted to see her die. I hated her and longed to torture her. It was no accident. I willed it."

Yes, up to the last moment she had willed it, up until it was too late. Now the Reverend Hilary was going to tell her it was not her fault. She wanted him, at least, to know the truth. She couldn't keep it all pent-up within her. She had to tell someone.

"I killed her," she repeated to his astounded ears. "I wanted her to die. Don't you see—she took Graham Starr away from me. I wanted him—I thought I wanted him. He wouldn't have me. I rode her down into the ice. I had to tell."

Children—bad, sinful, disobedient. The minister said to himself she was a child.

"You've been tormenting yourself with this," he said. "I should have come to you long ago. But I didn't know it was like that. I thought, as the rest of the world thinks, that you didn't blame yourself. You mustn't blame yourself. You are not to blame."

"I tried to stop at the very last minute," she said desperately, her fingers twining like small white tendrils on the beaded gloves in her lap. "There was no time."

"You are not to blame," repeated the minister. "I thought I would never have to say this, that there was no need of it. But only you, for your peace of mind, shall know. If it were given to the world one man, at least, would

suffer more than he suffers now. You know him. He thinks it was an accident; you think it was—murder on your part. Esther Pym told me with her dying breath that she, deliberately and with full intent to destroy herself, walked in front of your car. Let it be your secret and mine."

Denise is gone, Varick is gone, Graham Starr walks no more, masqued, among the little people. Hugo Ferrer and Roderick Dhu, growing feebler each day, still wander about the ancient city and in the green aisles of the Park. At night by his fireside Hugo sits and reads of old violins and splendid things like that. He chuckles over old Pepys and grows mystic like a little seer when he comes to the bellman's passing in the lone watches of the night, and looks afar off when he reads there was "a dog the King loved."

Buller comes some nights. They sit and have discussions. They mention Varick and Graham Starr.

"No," says Hugo Ferrer, "they won't come back. They were young. They came to disaster on the rock of woman. Perhaps they expected too much of life, too much of love. 'Tis like to be a sorely disappointing thing. Let us play some music now."

"Not Debussy," says Buller.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *This Thing Called Love* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]