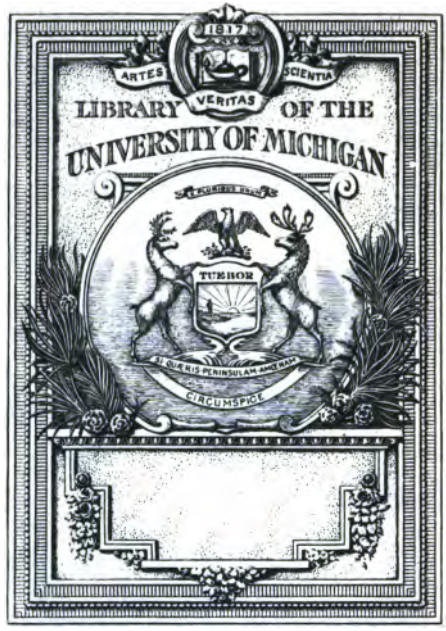
GARGOYLES

by

BEN HECHT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BEN HECHT

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I

GARGOYLES

I

The calendars said—1900. It was growing warm. George Cornelius Basine emerged from Madam Minnie's house of ill fame at five o'clock on a Sabbath May morning. He was twenty-five years old, neatly dressed, a bit unshaven and whistling valiantly, "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey, won't you come home?"

Considering the high estate which was to be his, as the estimable Senator Basine, the introduction savors of malice. But, it must be remembered, this was twenty-two years ago, and moreover, in a day before the forces of decency had triumphed. The soul of man was still unregenerate. Prostitutes, saloons, hell-holes still flourished unchallenged in the city's heart. And Basine even at twenty-five was not one of those aggravating anomalies who pride themselves upon being ahead of their time; or behind their time. Basine was of his time.

And on this day which witnessed him whistling on the doorstep of Madam Minnie's, the Devil was still a gentlemen, albeit a gentleman in bad standing. But, being a gentleman, he was tolerated. Tradition, in a manner, still clothed him in the guise of a Rabelaisian clown, high born but fallen. He walked abroad in his true character, flaunting his red tights, his cloven hoof, his spiked tail and his mysterious horns. A Mid-Victorian Devil innocent of further disguise, his face still undisfigured by the Kaiser's

mustachio or the Bolshevist's whiskers. A naive, unctuous lout of a Devil with straightforward Tempter's proclivities. An antagonist not for Dr. Wilsons and M. Clemenceaus and the Societies for the Spread of True Americanization, but an unpolitical, highly orthodox, leering, pitchfork-brandishing *vis â vis* for simple men of God. In short, the Devil was still a Devil and not a Complex.

It was growing warm and the calendars said—a new century . . . a new century. And the great men of the day pointed with stern, pregnant fingers at the calendars and proclaimed—a new century . . . a new century.

Beautiful phrase. The soul of man, in its struggle toward God knows what, paused elatedly to contemplate the new milestone. Elated as all youth is elated for no other reason than that there is a tomorrow, a tomorrow of unknown and multiple milestones. Elated with the knowledge of progress—that sage and flattering word by which the soul of man explains the baffling phenomenon of its survival.

The great men of the day stood staring through half-closed eyes at the calendars. To anticipate by a single day! But the future no less than the past remains a current mystery. And the great men—the prophets—confined themselves with stentorian caution to the prophecy—a new century has dawned.

Basine, whistling and waiting for his companion to emerge on Madam Minnie's doorstep, regarded the scene about him with the hardened moral indifference of youth. It was growing warm. The May sun was striding, an incongruous, provincial virgin, through a litter of blowzy streets. Under its mocking

light the rows of bawdy-houses and saloons suffered an architectural collapse. Walls, windows, roofs and chimneys leered tiredly at each other. The district seemed indeed an illustration for a parable of Vice and Virtue drawn by the venomously partial pen of some unusually half-witted cleric—dirty-faced brothels, tousled café signs, bleery sidewalks, toothless storefronts all cowering before the rebuke of God's sun.

A few mysterious solitaries lent a vague life to the scene. The figure of a drunk, unchastened, zigzagging humorously down the pavement like some nocturnal clown prowling after a vanished Bacchanal. A hastily dressed prostitute carrying her night's earnings as an offering to early devotion. A few unseasoned revellers overcome with a nostalgia for clean bathrooms and Sunday morning waffles at the family board, sleepily fleeing the scenes of their carouse.

All this formed no part of the preoccupations of the whistling one. He was waiting for his companion and for the fifteenth time the tune of "Bill Bailey" came softly from his lips. The companion appeared, a crestfallen young man of twenty-three, Hugh Keegan by name. An idiotic wistfulness marked the blond vacuity of his face. They said nothing and walked to the street car track.

Here they must wait. There was no car in sight. Basine employed the wait, jumping out from the curbing and peering with a great show of interest down the deserted tracks. The night's dissipation had left him perversely elate. His vanity demanded that he confound the scenes of his recent moral collapse

by exhibitions of undiminished vigor of body and gayety of mind. So he capered back and forth between the curb and the deserted tracks, ostentatiously unbuttoning his coat to the chill of the dawn and addressing brisk, cheerful sallies to his penitent friend.

It was this way with Basine. He had spent the night in sin. Now he must act as if he had not spent the night in sin. It was a matter of deceiving his conscience, and Basine's conscience did not live in Basine. It was, to the contrary, a mysterious external force, something quite outside him.

He eyed the virtuous hallalujahs of the sunrise with a somewhat over-emphasized aplomb. Dimly he felt that a God was articulating in dawns and sunbeams. As long as he had continued his whistling, these facts had remained concealed. But now he had grown tired of "Bill Bailey" and at once God, peering out of his beautiful rosy heaven was saying, "Shame on you." Everything seemed to be waiting to repeat this banal reproof.

This was the conscience of George Basine—a reproof that came from without. He felt an inclination to defiance before this reproof. . . He was young and given to evil. This was only natural, considering the time in which he lived and the biological impulses of youth.

But to do evil was one thing. To defend it after it was done was another. Thus Basine, having sinned lustily through the night, avoided the more unspeakable sin of defending his action. The reproof arrived, he faced it with candor and intelligence, prepared to admit that he had done wrong.

He did not want God mumbling around inside him as was the case with his friend Keegan. God mumbled around inside of Keegan and made him feel like the devil. But Basine—there was no occasion for God to argue His point. He, Basine, surrendered gracefully and forthwith. That was the way to handle situations of the soul.

To Basine, situations of the soul were a species of external discomforts he identified as God. They were the regulations and taboos of a civilization to which he was prepared at all times to submit, providing such submission did not compromise him. One got rid of taboos by looking them squarely in the eye and simulating respect or remorse. Taboos were good manners. One had to be polite to good manners. Basine laughed, not defiantly. He had already made his apologies to the dawn. The dawn was God's good manners. It entered the world as precisely and as perfectly as the saintly wife of a great financier might enter her grandmother's drawing room.

Waiting beside the car track, Basine was already a reformed and forgiven man. The sun was like a huge Salvation Army marching through the highways of Evil, beating great drums and singing, "Are you washed, are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" He was glad of it. He was glad to be once more a part of a virtuous world, a citizen of an ideal republic given to the great causes of progress.

This adjustment completed, memories of the night came to him as they waited for the car. These memories failed, naturally, to conflict with his character as a citizen of virtue. For they were memories which he was prepared at any moment to repudiate and de-

nounce. Thus prepared he could of course enjoy them.

The memories brought an elation, the elation which usually fills the healthy male of twenty-five upon discovering or rediscovering that the Devil is as alluring as he is painted and that the wages of sin are neither death nor disillusion. He had enjoyed himself. Sin was wrong. But if one knew it was wrong one could go ahead and enjoy it. The great thing was to know it was wrong, to admit it frankly and share in the general indignation of it and not to go around like a vicious-minded freak defending it, like some people he knew were in the habit of doing.

Thus on this May morning Basine was able to grasp the enormity of his offense and to apologize whole-heartedly for its commission and simultaneously to enjoy the memory of it. He had come away from Madam Minnie's with an egoistic impression of his prowess and with the self-satisfaction which comes of the knowledge of having cheated the devil out of his due by his careful method. He remembered with a warmth in his throat as if he were recalling something beautiful how the creature had looked at the first moment she stood before him.

He had spent the earlier part of the night getting creditably drunk. Lured into a brothel by a woman with a hard, childish face, he had devoted himself for several hours to the despicable business of sin. The sordid make-believe of passion had pleased him vastly. He had managed in fact to achieve an observation on life. As the night waned he had grown philosophical and thought, how with good women one began with personal talk, with an exchange of confidences.

One began with emotions, with gentle lacerations, wistfulness, sadness. And one progressed from these toward the intimacy of physical contact. But with bad women one began with the intimacy of physical contact. Only the abrupt matter-of-fact tone of the thing robbed the contact of all intimacy. And one progressed from this contact toward a wistfulness, a gentle shyness and finally an exchange of confidences and personal talk. This last contained in it the thrill of intimacy. A good woman surrendered her body and inspired thereby a sense of possession. A bad woman surrendered the secret of her birthplace and of her real name and inspired a similar sense. There was also obvious the fact that the same sense of dramatic coquetry, idealism, modesty or whatever it was that induced the good woman to withhold her body induced the bad woman to withhold her confidence.

Under the influence of this knowledge, Basine had pursued the usual tactics of the predatory male and, as a fillip to the unimaginative excitements of the night, obtained from his accomplice in sin the story of her life.

"The mystery of a bad woman is that she was once virtuous," he thought as he fell asleep. "Just as the mystery of a virtuous woman is that she could be bad."

An hour later he awoke and with a thrill of quixotic honesty placed five dollars in the moist hand of the sleeping houri, gathered his friend Keegan out of an adjoining room and emerged once more into the world with a clear head, a body full of elated memories and a laudable conviction that he had done wrong, but that what happened yesterday was not a

part of today and that a man can grant himself absolution from sin as easily as he can lay aside virtue.

As for Keegan, he stared with mild eyes at the dawn, at the beggarly alleys and the negro porter dreamily sweeping cigar stubs out of a lopsided doorway. He listened patiently to his friend's enthusiasms. To Keegan there was something inexplicable about Basine's morning-after pose. Keegan had not found a place for God. Platitudes were not a background against which he might posture to his convenience. Instead they were terrible intimates. They operated his thought for him.

After committing a sin one should be repentent. The commission of sin was, of course, an outrage. But somehow the platitudes did not quite reach into the bedroom of evil. They remained hovering outside the door marking time, as it were, and whispering through the keyhole, "just wait . . . just wait . . ."

And as soon as he had emerged from the room, in fact even before that, they had taken possession of him again. They demanded now repentance, thorough repentance which included thorough repudiation of all joyous memories, all pleasurable moments. And Keegan, surrendering himself as a matter of necessity to their demands presented the exterior of a sorrowing victim to the dawn. He offered a nod or a surprised stare as punctuation for his friend's discourse, chewing the while on an unsuccessfully lighted cigar which tasted sour.

"There was something different about her from the usual girl of that kind," Basine was explaining. "Wouldn't talk for a while but finally got confidential and began to cry a bit."

This was a lie, reflecting credit, however, on the youth's dramatic sense and vanity. The knowledge that the creature under discussion had been actually no different from the six other ladies of her profession with whom he had experienced moral collapses since leaving the university in no way interfered with his opinion of the recent episode.

It was his opinion that things he touched were somehow different from things other young men dallied with; that events which befell him were of a certain mysterious fiber lacking in the events which befell others. Thus he was reduced to the necessity of continual lying in order to vindicate this conviction, more powerful than reality. Lying to himself as much as to anyone else. By his lies Basine accomplished the dual purpose of adjusting inferior incidents to the superiority of his nature and of impressing this superiority upon his friends. A way of rewriting life so as to fit himself with the heroic part, as yet denied him in the manuscript and which he sincerely felt was his due.

"Yes, she cried a bit. They usually do, you know."

Keegan was innocent of this phenomenon, but nodded. He felt mysteriously saddened by the fact that they never wept for him. Life denied him many things. The creature he had spent the night with had treated him somewhat brutally. She had laughed several times. He sought, however, to make up for the indifference with which he felt himself treated by heightening his contempt for her as a sinner. This necessitated an increase of his contempt for himself as having been a partner in evil. But that was a spiritual gesture made bearable by the wave of remorse

it aroused and by the knowledge that remorse was a laudable emotion. Nevertheless, despite the remorse and the rehabilitation it offered his vanity, he continued to feel—life denied him many things.

Basine continued, "You could take a girl like that and make something of her. Give her a month." By which he meant give George Cornelius Basine a month and see the miracle he would work.

Keegan sighed. He admired George, and his admiration of others always depressed him. He was intelligent enough to know that he admired things he lacked. And yet, he assured himself, he would despise the things in himself that he admired in others. Therefore, it was very probable that he despised them in others, or would at some later day, unless he managed to conceal the fact or lose track of it in the confusion of platitudes which served him for a brain. He looked enviously at his friend, before whom hardened trollops dissolved in tears.

"She's only been in the game a little while, you know, Hugh. A convent girl, too. She told me her story. How she got started, you know. A love affair with a Spaniard. A highly connected fellow."

Basine prattled on, improvising a melodrama of virtue led astray, editing the vaguely worded generalities of the creature he had left asleep. Eventually he tired of the game and announced abruptly.

"Not a car in sight. What do you say we walk, Hugh?"

The idea of walking four miles home after a wild night engaged his vanity. Things by which he proved the dubious superiority of his body pleased him.

"I think I'll run along," said Keegan.

"Nothing doing, Hughie. You come with me. We'll have breakfast at my house."

Keegan frowned. There were two sisters and a mother in Basine's home.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because."

Basine persisted, gently malicious. It amused him to inconvenience his friend's scruples. It also gave him a feeling of moral supremacy. Keegan was ashamed to go to his home with him. He pitied him for this and yet enjoyed the fact. It was because Keegan didn't feel sure of himself, of his being a man of virtue. And he, Basine, did. There was no question about it in his mind.

"Ashamed?" he asked with a smile.

"No," Keegan grunted.

"Well, you haven't done anything worse than me." by which he meant "We do things differently and I am above things that knock you out."

Keegan stared at his friend furtively. There were things inexplicable in George Basine. He must admire them. There was nothing inexplicable in himself.

He hesitated about going, however. A combination of platitudes was involved. He felt the necessity of repentance. And then he felt the necessity of hiding his shame. And finally platitude cautioned him indignantly against affronting three good women—a mother and two daughters—with the presence of one lately come from the flesh pots of Satan. This was a superior platitude because it came also under the index of good manners.

But Basine, taking him by the elbow, swept him along, platitudes and all. An inexplicable Basine whom he admired, envied, despised, and who was his best friend and his model. They walked together, Basine briskly to hide the sudden heaviness of his legs; Keegan yielding to the less pronounced physical drain he had undergone and falling into a weary, protesting gait.

2

The death of Howard Basine had precipitated a creditable outburst of grief on the part of his widow and two daughters. The event had brought his son George home from college.

They had shared a bed for twenty-six years, Basine *père* and Basine *mère,* achieving an utter disregard of each other which both took pride in identifying as domestic happiness. In their youth love had brought them together while comparative strangers. And after twenty-six years death had parted them still strangers. But now complete and total strangers —Siamese twins who had never been introduced to each other.

Each had grown old by the side of the other, subscribing to the same thoughts, worries, ambitions. It was as if a thin shell had grown around each of them. This shell was their home, their mutual interest in bank balances, diversions and tomorrows. It was the product of their practical energies—their standing in the eyes of their friends, their success and their solidity as a social unit. It was their pride in new rugs, in invitations to functions, in their children.

There were two shells. One was Basine *père.* One

was Basine *mère*. For twenty-six years these two shells cohabited together. But inside each of them there had been a world of things that had never connected and that remained forever part of a mutually preserved secret. Little daydreams, absurdities, the swaggering, pensive, impractical rigmarole of thought-life to which the world of reality—the shell-world—had remained almost to the last no more than a vaguely sensed exterior.

Each of them had lived almost continually apart from this shell. They had given but a fraction of their energies toward its creation. It had required only a little part of themselves to become two placidly successful conventionally happy people with a home and family. The rest of themselves they had allowed to evaporate.

A pleasing process—evaporation. Dreams, ambitions, longings—all these had evaporated slowly and secretively during the twenty-six years, vanished into thin air. And each had been preoccupied with this process of evaporation. It had been their real life—the life which diverted them and which they mutually concealed from each other as they sat together reading of evenings, or rode in cars or waited in offices or lay in bed.

Here in this real life were success and beauty and marvelous activities. Here Basine *père* planned Herculean enterprise and triumphed with magnificent gestures, became a leader of finance, of armies; became a lover of queens and odalisques. Caressing from day to day phantasms which had no existence, it was in them that he chiefly existed. He confined himself not only to illusions of grandeur. There were

also little things, charming minor victories which delighted his ego almost as much as the greater ones. He was able to trick out the minor victories with the illusion of reality. They were things that might happen, that one could dream about almost as actually happening. Things that he fancied people might be saying about him; admissions that he fancied people might make to him; dreams that he fancied he inspired in women who passed him and whom he never saw again.

This illusory existence preoccupying Basine had fitted him ideally for the companionship of orderly, placid-minded folk preoccupied like himself with similar processes of evaporation. These folk were his friends with whom he went to the theater, played cards, transacted business, discussed issues. They were known as normal, practical persons. The vast, illusory worlds in which they lived during the greater part of their hours in no way encroached upon the realities of their day.

They were proud of having a grip on themselves, by which they meant of being able to allow their energies to evaporate secretively instead of feeling inspired to harness them to realities and run the risk of being hoisted body and soul out of their shells into a maelstrom of uncertainties and hullabaloos. In order to rationalize the disparity between their actual estates and the fantastic estates of their illusory lives, they devoted a part of their energies to the practical business of glorifying their shells. They subscribed with indignation, sometimes with fanaticism, to all social, spiritual and political ideas which had for their objective the glorification of their shells.

They became champions of systems of thought and conduct which excused on one hand and deified on the other their devitalized modes of existence.

In fact as they grew older they developed a curious egoism which took the form of a pride in their suppressions. They thought of themselves as men who had achieved a superior sanity. This sanity lay in being able to recognize the real from the unreal. The real was their shell. The unreal consisted of the fantasies produced by the process of evaporation. This sanity, too, enabled them to regard their imaginings and dreamings with an amused condescension and to mature into unruffled effigies—pratical, hard-headed business men.

The evaporation, however, influenced them in one vital respect. It effected what they called their taste in the arts. They desired things they read or listened to in the theater to be authentic interpretations not of the realities about them but of the illusions in which they secretly exhausted themselves. They desired the heroes and heroines of literature and drama to be like the creatures and excitements of the soap-bubble worlds bursting conveniently about their hard heads. And so in their reading and theater going they enjoyed only those things which afforded a few hours of vicarious reality to the grotesqueries, to the fairy tale expansions of their departing dreams.

During the last years of his life Basine had experienced the fullest rewards of a virtuous, practical life. At fifty he had become empty. The rigmarole of day dreams grew vaguer and finally ceased. He had become bored with his grandiose and illusory selves. Don Juan, Napoleon, Croesus, no longer wore the

features of Basine. There was no longer any thrill in idly decorating his tomorrows with kaleidscopic make-believes.

There was no great tragedy in this. He was bored with his imagination because he had run through the repertoire of his fancies too often and so, slowly, his days grew more and more void of unrealities. Slowly also he turned to the tangible things around him. He contemplated proudly the details of his shell. It was a comforting shell. It fitted him snugly. It consisted of his friends, his home, his children, his borrowed ideas, his wife.

No outward change was to be noticed in Basine *père* when this happened. There was nothing to say that the process of evaporation had ended and that there was left an animate husk called Howard Basine; a husk that did not mourn at the knowledge of its emptiness but that accepted instead with piety and gratitude the presence of other husks, pleased and warmed to move among their empty companionships.

It was at this time that Basine proudly felt himself a worthwhile member of society and grew to smile with tolerant disdain upon all persons who busied themselves with the illusions he had overcome by the simple process of denying them life. He called them fools, scoundrels, lunatics and dreamers and he agreed with his friends that they were creatures engaged in filling the world with discomfort and error. His dislike for them did not make him unhappy for he was content in the flattering knowledge that most people, everybody he knew and whose opinion he valued, were like himself. His thoughts were nearly everybody's thoughts and his life was like everybody's life.

There was a sense of strength, even satisfaction in this. He relapsed gracefully into a quiet emptiness out of which he was able to derive final embalming fluid for his vanity by pitying the distractions and unrest of others.

Then he died. The sight of her husband lying under the glass of the coffin had reminded Mrs. Basine of the curious fact that in their youth love had brought them together. A memory burrowed its way from under the debris of twenty-six years and confronted her. A memory of wild nights, flushed cheeks, shining eyes, hope and careless words. And the dim yesterday, the long-forgotten yesterday that lay in the coffin with the paunchy figure of the bald-headed silk-merchant became suddenly real again.

When she was alone that night Mrs. Basine wept miserably for a love that had died twenty-five years ago and lain buried and unmourned under the débris of these years. A tardy exhibition of grief, sincere but enfeebled by its own age, it spent itself in a few hours. The tears for the memory of vanished youth and vanished love of which the body waiting in the coffin had become for a space of grotesque symbol, were followed by the inarticulate sense of an anticlimax.

Howard Basine's dying was somehow not a tragedy to the woman who had lived with him for twenty-six years. When she had wept at first, the idea of death came like a panic to her heart. Things had died. Days, nights, hopes had died. But she had been unaware of their dying. The figure of her husband leaving for his day's work, returning from his day's work, sitting at the head of the table, retiring to bed

with her—this had been a mask behind which the dying of things remained concealed.

Now that he had closed his eyes and vanished it was as if a mask had been removed. One could see all at once all the things that had died. And she saw not only Howard lying dead, but most of herself. In her mind she had no memory of the illusory selves she had lived, like her husband, alone. These illusory selves whose successes and romances she had caressed in secret had of late abandoned her. Like her husband she had turned to the shells they had created about themselves as the comforting reward of her life's negation.

Now it struck her that these shells were full of dead things. While he lived they had seemed alive. The fact that the man with whom she had survived twenty-six years continued to talk and to move had given her the vague feeling that these years were also still alive, still existent somewhere. Now the man was dead and the years were dead with him. They had been dead all the while but they had not lain in a coffin for one to look at like this.

Dead years. And she, a survivor. Her sense of contact with the past deserted her. She was alone. Everything that had been was no more and it seemed during her grief as if it had never existed.

She lay and wept, feeling that something had been terribly wasted. Once there had been youth. Now there was age. She had already lived but how, where? Look, she was already old but how had it happened? She who could remember so many things about youth —her pretty face, her careless hopes, bright, happy excitements; and most of all, the feeling that things

lay ahead—that a store of mysterious things waited for her—she who could remember it so plainly was an old woman. It had seemed natural before he died but now it seemed unnatural. She would die soon, too. Her youth—something she thought of as youth, arose and stretched out far-away arms to her. It came to her in the night and stood smiling at her like a ghost of herself. Yes, she was already dead and she could lie in bed weeping for her husband and staring with tired eyes at memories. Thoughts did not disturb her. Her emotions, grown too involved for the shallows of her mind, gave her the consciousness merely of a panic.

But the panic left. It receded slowly and the death of her husband stirred in her during the first weeks of mourning a gentle affection for the man. She closeted herself with the memories that had terrified her —sensual memories of an impetuous lover, an idealization of a long-forgotten Howard. And her sorrow became like a vague honeymoon shared with slowly dissolving erotic shadows.

This too went. As it went away the widow became curiously younger in her features, her black clothes, her mannerisms. She grew to find the loneliness of her bed desirable. She would snuggle kittenishly between the empty sheets, an unintelligible sense of immorality—as if it were immoral to sleep alone—lending a luxury to her weariness.

Yes, it was somehow nicer to sleep alone, to have the bedroom all to herself. In her mind things that were different from the routine of her life and that belonged to the secret imaginings that had once filled her days were immoral. And this was different—

being alone. So her living on without her husband became an odd sort of infidelity, pleasant, diverting.

The year and a half passed bringing a rejuvenation to her body. Her youth and its decline were buried in a coffin. Now at fifty-two she was living again and creating out of the remains of her figure, coiffure and complexion a new youth—at least a new exterior.

The dreams of her earlier days returned to her and she no longer found it necessary to deny them all reality. It had been necessary before in order to keep herself fitted into the shell. And as a result her dreams, denied any possibility of realization, had become like his, more and more fantastic, more and more warmly improbable. Now there was no need for a shell. There was no need to preserve an easily recognizable and never failing characterization. She had done that before so as to avoid confusing her husband and herself and she had been rewarded by a similar ruse employed by him.

Now that he was gone she found herself changing. She found herself approaching the romantic conception of herself. And since she was able to carry into reality her rejuvenated fancies, to devote herself to looking stunning, to making a somewhat exotic impression upon people, to arousing interest—her imaginings did not expand as before into distorted and improbable pictures. She began to busy herself, to actively give them outlet, to have time or surplus energies for the evolution of fancies beyond her.

She had no plans for the future and she was not interested in any. An amazing fact had come into her life—the present. She abandoned herself to it. She had harnessed what was left of the energies allowed

so long to evaporate and the process of evaporation was at an end. She would become, if there was time, a keenly alive, egoistic woman gorging herself upon the desserts remaining at the banquet board before which she had sat for twenty-six years with closed eyes and listless hands.

She felt these things only dimly. There was a freedom to life, like a new taste in her senses. Of this she was confusedly aware. And her sorrow for her dead husband became a pleasant thing, a thing inseparable from the gratitude she unknowingly felt for the new existence his death had given her.

She referred to him with a pensively magnanimous air, inventing perfections in his character and endowing his departed intelligence with a wisdom far beyond her own. This enabled her to utilize his memory in an odd way. When she argued with her friends or children, when she was doubtful concerning the extravagance or selfishness of her actions, or the newly born radicalism of her views, she would quote mercilessly from her dead husband. The fact that he was dead lent a sanctity to whatever views he may have held. Not in her own eyes but, as she shrewdly sensed, in the eyes of others. And she grew to play unscrupulously upon this thing she perceived in her children and friends—that they respected the words and opinions of a dead man infinitely more than those of one alive.

Thus she was able to indulge herself in ways which would have astounded and perhaps horrified the departed Basine and to bring her immediate circle to accept these ways as conventionally desirable by making her dead husband their spiritual sponsor. Her

friends chafed under this ruse, but felt themselves powerless to combat it. They were men and women who lived on the opinions of the dead, who subscribed fanatically to all ideas sanctified by the length of their interment. Themselves, they practised the ruse of editing the wisdoms of the past as well as prophecies of the future into vindications of the present. They felt indignant but powerless before the treachery of Mrs. Basine, who raided the mausoleum for private articles of faith.

Mrs. Basine was aware at first of lying but this feeling gave way to a conviction that if her husband had not thought and said the things she attributed to him while he was alive he would have done so had he continued to live.

"Because," she said to herself, "we were always alike and thought and said the same things always."

Her son George was proud of his mother but inclined to be dubious about the change that had come over her. He was irritated particularly one evening to hear his mother advocate equal suffrage rights for women to a group of surprised friends gathered at their home.

"I think such ideas foolish and dangerous," George explained politely.

"Why?" his mother inquired.

Basine shook his head. He had given the subject no thought. But a militant defense of the status quo inspired him always with a comfortable feeling of rectitude.

"I see no reason," pursued Mrs. Basine, "why women shouldn't vote as well as men. I remember your father was very much interested in the issue of

women's suffrage. He said the day would come when women voted shoulder to shoulder with men and that the country would be improved by it."

Basine stared at his mother. He had grown to realize that she had discovered the trick of lending weight and irrefutable wisdoms to her own notions by surrounding them with the sanctity of death. For it was almost impossible to fly in the face of a quotation from his father. The fact that the man was dead seemed to make contradiction of any ideas or prophecies attributed to him a sacrilege. There was also the fact becoming daily more obvious that his mother was turning into an unscrupulous administrator of the dead man's opinions.

"I never heard father say anything of the kind," he exclaimed suddenly. And then feeling that a loss of temper was the only way in which he could cover the affront he had offered his mother, he added with indignation, "You keep backing up your arguments by dragging dad's corpse into them all the time."

Mrs. Basine looked at him in amazement, and he reddened. He apologized quickly. Mrs. Basine, shocked by her son's unexpected penetration, bit her lip and became silent. She let the argument pass, not without observing that her friends present appeared for a moment to rally around her son's exposè—as if he had given words to their own attitude. She decided when she was alone again to be more careful. She loved her son and felt a dread of sacrificing his respect. There was a dread also of sacrificing the respect of these others who had looked at her for a moment with an accusing understanding.

There had been present a Mrs. Gilchrist, an old

creature of oracular senilities whom she had grown secretly to detest. But the detestation she felt was accompanied by a vivid desire to keep in with the woman. Mrs. Gilchrist was a person of position, decided position. Her son Aubrey was a novelist. This alone endowed the Gilchrist tribe with an aura of culture. They lived in Evanston and were active, mother and son, in the social life of the town.

Mrs. Basine was unable as yet to determine the reasons that made her dislike her. In her secret mind she called Mrs. Gilchrist a domineering old fool. But she stopped with that. There was the Gilchrist social position.

Society had always interested Mrs. Basine. But since her widowhood this interest had become active. She had read the society columns of the newspapers regularly and through the twenty-six years of her married life retained the singular idea that the people whose names appeared in these columns belonged to a closely knit organization similar to the Masons—only of course, infinitely superior.

The appearance of a new name among the list of socially known always stirred an indignation in her. She was not a bounder herself. The closely knit organization whose members poured tea, gave bazaars, occupied boxes at the theater had been, in her mind, a fixed and invulnerable institution neither to be taken by storm nor won by strategy. Thus she had excused her lack of social ambition and success by investing Society with an almost magical aloofness, a sort of superhuman cotorie of tea pourers and benefit givers that kept itself intact and beyond intrusion by the exercise of incredible diligence.

Among her day dreams during these years had been those of magnificent social successes, of long newspaper articles describing with awe her splendor and prestige. But in reality she would as soon have thought of breaking into society as of attacking twelve policemen with a carving knife. She resented therefore the appearance of new names in the society columns.

"Bounders," she would murmur to herself, half expecting that the Organization into which they had bounded would issue some outraged and withering excommunication upon the new tea pourer. But the name would appear again and again and after such innumerable appearances Mrs. Basine would automatically accept its presence within the Organization and rally quixotically to its defense against the other bounders struggling to invade the sanctity it had achieved.

And although during this period of her life Mrs. Basine had felt none of the low instincts which inspired the bounders to bound, she had endeavored to the best of her abilities to mimic as much as a humble outsider could the spiritual elegancies which distinguished the Organization. She succeeded in creating a formal atmosphere about her home, a dignity about her table of which she was modestly proud. She had felt in secret that any member of the Organization entering her house—an event of which she dreamed as a waveringly sophisticated child might dream of a fairy's visit—would have experienced no dismay.

Now this attitude which had characterized her married life was changing. Society was no longer an impregnable Organization. Mrs. Basine was, in fact,

engaged determinedly upon its conquest and her attitude toward the detestable Mrs. Gilchrist was colored by that fact. An acquaintanceship with the Gilchrists had been achieved through manœuverings of her daughters as workers in charity bazaars managed by the woman.

Until the death of her husband Mrs. Basine had ignored her two daughters. A proprietory feeling in them which exhausted itself in dictating the surface details of their lives had been the extent of her interest. She had presumed during their childhood and adolescence that they were Basines—and nothing else. This had guided her parenthood. Being Basines, they must conform to Basinism which meant that they must be like their mother or their father and she struggled carelessly to see that their youth did not assert itself in ways inimical to her own characterization. Doris the younger was inclined to be beautiful. Fanny, however, had always seemed to her a more substantial person.

But her widowhood had brought a belated curiosity concerning these young women. She wondered at times what their dreams were. She understood that they were strangers and this began to interest her. She was proud of them and although undemonstrative would sometimes put her arms around both of them as they walked to a neighbor's after dinner.

They did not inspire the pride in her, however, that her son did. George had finished his law and she felt as she listened to him talk or watched his face at the table that he was somebody. There was an assurance and health about him. His keen-featured face, the straight black hair parted in the center, the

movements of his lithe body, always quick and definite —and particularly his hands—these made her think of him vaguely as an artist, somebody different. She knew in her heart that although he seemed to differ in his ideas from none of their friends, he was not like other young men.

3

It was Sunday morning. Mrs Basine and her two daughters were sitting down to breakfast. Hugh Keegan followed Basine embarrassedly into the dining room. The two young men had been renovating themselves for an hour in the bathroom.

The meal started casually. Fanny Basine studied their guest with what was meant to be a provoking carelessness. She was a facile virgin who wooed men persistently and slapped their faces for misunderstanding her.

"You've been quite a stranger, Mr. Keegan," she said. Her eyes smiled. Keegan felt wretched. He was conscious of being unclean. The fresh, virginal face of the girl smiling at him filled him with rage. He accepted a waffle from Mrs. Basine with exaggerated formality.

He was not enraged with himself. This was too difficult. It was easier, simpler to be repentant. His repentance did not accuse him as a man who had sinned but denounced the things which had caused him to sin and made him unclean. To himself he was essentially perfect. There were forces, however, which infringed upon his perfection, which soiled his fine qualities.

Eating his waffle, he thought of the creature with

whom he had spent the night, of the dismal bedroom, the frowsy smelling hallway, the coarse talk and viciousness of the entire business. And he began to feel a rage against them. He would like to wipe such things out of the world. He managed to answer Miss Basine politely.

"I've been out of town a great deal," he said.

"George always said you were a gadfly," Fanny replied.

Mrs. Basine spoke.

"You look rather tired, George." She gazed pensively at her son. "I don't like you to stay out all night like that."

Basine frowned. What did his mother mean by that? Did she suppose he had spent the night in debauchery? It sounded that way from the way she looked and talked. Basine grew angry. He did not want his mother to accuse him.

"You don't expect a man to remain cooped up night and day, do you?"

"Oh, I don't mind your going out. But not the way you did last night."

She looked at him and then, as if realizing for the first time the presence of her daughters, changed her manner.

"Won't you have some syrup, Mr. Keegan."

Keegan thanked her and lowered his eyes. He had understood her accusation and accepted it as authentic. He had no mother of his own and this inspired in him a curious sense of obedience toward all mothers he encountered. Mrs. Basine's accusation embarrassed him. The embarrassment increased his disgust for the memory of the night. He would like

to wipe out such obscene and vulgar things. He would like to burn them up, forbid them. Someday he would.

Basine, however regarded his mother with a sense of outrage. The fact that her surmise of what he had done during the night was correct was a matter of minor importance. She didn't know what he had done and therefore she had no right to guess. He answered her angrily.

"I did nothing at all last night that I wouldn't have my sisters do."

His mother looked at him in surprise. Keegan blushed.

"You're always hinting around, mother, about things and you're absolutely wrong. Absolutely," he added for a clincher. His eyes remained unflinchingly on his mother.

There was a convincing air of virtue about him and a doubt entered her mind. Perhaps she had suspected him unjustly. But he had been away all night. She had heard him come in around six. Where could he have been if not—in such places? Yet she felt like apologizing.

Basine fiddled with his food. He was acting out the part of injured innocence. He was an unprotesting martyr to the low suspicions of his family. The fact that he was guilty in no way interfered with the sincerity of his injured feelings. His mother's accusation had sincerely hurt him, even more than it would had he been actually innocent of wrong doing. He transferred whatever emotional guilt he had into indignation toward his accuser.

This was an old trick of his, developed early in

childhood—a faculty of committing crimes without becoming a criminal. More than Keegan, he was above self-accusation. But unlike Keegan the doing of a thing he knew to be wrong did not inspire him with the adroit remorse which took the form of hating the thing he had done instead of himself.

The crimes Basine committed—usually no greater than normal violations of the ethical code to which he subscribed—were things that had nothing to do with the real Basine. The real Basine was the Basine whom people knew. The real Basine was a characterization he maintained for the benefit of others. The crimes were his own secret. People didn't know them. Therefor they did not exist. They remained locked away. He did not say to himself, "Hypocrite! Liar!"

When he denied his mother's accusation he did not of course forget the things he had done during the night. In fact even while he spoke there came to him a vivid memory of the prostitute.

In disproving the existence of this memory he was not disproving it for himself but for his mother. His energy as usual was bent toward presenting a certain Basine for the admiration of another. The Basine he sought to create for the admiration of his family was a moral and honest man. When they seemed inclined to challenge this creation, their suspicions angered him.

His attitude was that of a creator toward a hostile critic. He frequently lost his temper and denounced their suspicions as unjust, unfair. And in his mind, conveniently clouded by indignation, they were. Not to himself as he was, but to the self he insisted upon pretending at the moment he was.

This self was the Basine he was continually creating—a Basine that was not based upon deeds or truths or facts but upon ideals. It was an ideal Basine—a nobly edited version of his character. He believed in this ideal Basine with a curious passion. This ideal Basine was a mixture of lies, shams, perversions of fact. But that was only when you considered him in relation to his creator—to its original. In his own mind it was as absurd to consider this ideal Basine in relation to its creator as it would have been for a critic of æsthetics to consider the merits of Oscar Wilde's poetry in relation to the degeneracy of the man.

Considered by himself, the ideal Basine was a person of inspiring virtues. He was proud of the things he pretended to be, vicious in their defense, unswerving in his efforts to inspire others with an appreciation of these pretenses.

His anger toward his mother ebbed as he noticed the doubt come into her manner. She had hesitated for a moment in face of significant facts, in accepting the ideal Basine. But her son's sincerity had convinced her as it convinced most people who knew him. The sincerity with which he defended the idealization of himself was easily to be mistaken for a sincerity inspired by an innocence of actual wrongdoing.

As soon as he felt certain he had re-established the ideal Basine in his mother's eyes, all thoughts of the facts passed from him. The admiring opinion of others was what his nature desired and what his energies worked for. Once obtained this admiration was a mirror in which he saw himself only as he had argued others into seeing him.

He looked at his friend Keegan with a smile. Keegan was still blushing. Keegan knew that he had lied and that the entire pose was a sham. But this only added another thrill to the fleeting self-satisfaction of having re-established himself in his family's eyes. He enjoyed the knowledge that Keegan was able to see what a successful liar he was and how adroitly he managed to deceive people. This enjoyment was not a part of the emotion of the ideal Basine. It was a purely human sensation felt by Basine, the creator.

There was a single flaw in his little triumph. This was, as usual, the attitude of his sister Doris. While the others were chattering Doris kept silent. She had dark eyes and black hair. She was entirely unlike anybody in the Basine family. Fanny was blonde and vivacious with a pout and full red lips. Before the death of her husband Mrs. Basine had summed up her daughter Doris as being aristocratic.

At fifteen Doris had been painfully shy. People smiled encouragingly at her because she seemed afraid of them. Four years later people ceased to smile at her. They looked at her out of the corners of their eyes and wondered what she was thinking about. Her silence was like a confusing argument. Had it not been for her beauty her silence could easily have been dismissed. But her dark eyes and dark hair, the slightly lowered pose of her oval face and the unvarying line of her fresh lips with the little sensual bulges at their corners, drew the attention of people. And their attention drawn, they waited to be told something. So merely because she told nothing they fancied she had a great deal to tell. They attributed to

her silence all the doubts they had concerning themselves. Silence was to them always accusation.

Her brother's attitude toward Doris was typical. He detested her and yet was more pleased when she nodded at something he said than when others were loud with acclaim. He detested her because she made him feel she was his superior. In what way she was superior he didn't know and why he felt it he couldn't understand. But he sensed she was someone who had no respect for the ideal Basine and no particular love for his creator.

She had also a way of deflating him. He felt sometimes as a toy balloon might feel in the presence of a child with a pin. He never ignored her. He watched her always and studied her carefully. He did not desire to please her but he felt that until he had perfected the ideal Basine to a point where he would be acceptable to Doris, admired by Doris, his creation would be lacking in something vital.

As the breakfast came to an end her brother focused upon Doris. This was invariably the effect of her silence. She was as yet unconscious of it. Had you asked her why she spoke so little and why she neither smiled nor frowned at people she would have thought a while and then with a shrug replied, "Why, I hadn't noticed." Later when she was alone she would have continued thinking of the question and perhaps said to herself, "It must be because they don't interest me. They seem so silly and unreal."

"What are you doing today?" Basine asked her.

She answered, "Nothing." He noticed she failed to add, "Why?" He resented her lack of curiosity. Fanny would have said, "Nothing. Why do you

ask?" But Fanny was a good fellow, a lively, amusing child.

"Mrs. Gilchrist and Aubrey are coming over later," Mrs. Basine announced.

"She makes me tired," Fanny smiled. "And somebody ought to pull dear Aubrey's nose just to see if he's really alive. He's too dignified."

Her brother nodded.

"Do you know him?" Fanny asked Keegan.

"Slightly," said Keegan. "I've read one or two of his books. They're very interesting." He paused, hoping that everyone agreed with him. Everyone did except Doris.

"What's the matter, Dorie? Don't you like Aubrey's works?" her brother asked. Doris smiled vaguely.

"I've never read anything he's written," she said. "I don't know."

Keegan looked at her uncomfortably. He felt he disliked her and he would have been pleased to ignore her. But the fact that she seemed to have anticipated him in this respect and to have ignored him first, piqued him.

"I think Judge Smith and Henrietta will be over later," Basine addressed his mother. Judge Smith was the august and senior partner of the law firm that had taken young Basine into its office.

"Yes, Aubrey told me," Mrs. Basine said casually. "I think they're engaged."

"Who, Henrietta?" from Fanny.

Her mother nodded. She stood up and the group sauntered into the living room. Keegan approached Fanny. Her freshness made him feel sad.

"Lets sit here," Fanny whispered as he drew near her. She employed the whisper frequently. It usually brought a gleam into the eyes of her *vis a vis* as if she had promised something.

To appear to promise something was Fanny's chief object in life. It was the basis of her growing popularity. The two sat down in a corner of the room secluded from the others. Keegan had interested her. At least his far-away, unappraising look had interested her. She preferred men more appraising and less far-away. Her object now was to reduce her brother's friend to an admirer. Admirers bored her. But the process of converting strangers, particularly far-away and unappraising strangers, into admirers was diverting.

Keegan had other plans. A desire to repent aloud had been growing in Keegan. The girl's bright face and virginal air had been inspiring him. He wanted to tell her how unclean he was and how ashamed of the things he had done. He wanted to denounce sin.

He felt tired. Fanny talked and he listened. He wanted to weep. He thought her fingers were beautiful and white. He would have liked to kneel beside her weeping, his head against her and her cool white fingers running over his face. It would be a sort of absolution—a maternal absolution. In the meantime his silence piqued her.

"You don't seem very interested in what I'm saying," she interrupted herself. She looked at him and instinct supplied her with a new attack.

"Where were you and George last night?" she asked. "Mother was furious about it."

Keegan looked sad. His blond face collapsed.

"Men are awful rotters," he answered, lowering his voice.

"Oh I don't know. Not all men."

"Yes. All men." Savagely.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because—" Keegan hesitated. Mysterious impulses were operating behind his talk. The night's debauch had sickened him. He was experiencing that depressing type of virtue which usually comes as a reaction from an orgy. His indignation at the bestiality of the male and the moral rotteness of life was a vindication of the temporary weakened state the night had induced in him. By denouncing sex he excused the disturbing absence of it in himself.

He was however not content to vindicate the absence in himself of sensual excitement. He would also make use of his lassitude by translating the enervation it produced into self-ennobling emotions, into purity, innate and triumphant. He experienced high-minded ideas and an exaltation of spirit.

"Because," he repeated, finding it difficult to chose words sufficiently emasculated to reflect the phenomenal purity of his mind, "well, if women knew, they would never talk to men. But women are so good, that is, decent women, that they simply don't understand and can't understand . . . what it is."

"About bad men?" Fanny whispered. Keegan nodded.

"And are all men bad?" she asked.

Again Keegan nodded, this time more sadly. It was a nod of confession and purity. In it he felt his obscene past and his pious future embrace each other,

one whispering "forgive" and the other whispering "yes, yes. All is forgiven."

Tears warmed his throat. Fanny's eyes looked at him with an odd excitement. Her mind was as always conveniently blank of thought. Thoughts would have served only to embarrass and handicap her. She was able to enjoy herself more easily without thinking. It was a ruse which enabled her to regard herself as a clean-minded girl.

Young men had frequently taken advantage of her kindness and grown bold. They would during a tender embrace sometimes take liberties or draw her close and press themselves against her. It was at this point that her mind would awake like a burglar alarm suddenly set off. It rang and clanged—an outraged and intimidating ding-dong of virtuous platitudes which she had incongruously rigged up in the sensual warmth of her nature. But lately the mechanism by which she routed her would-be seducers did not quite satisfy her.

At twenty she had grown fearful. When she was younger the men she led on were no more than boys. The mechanism had sufficed for them. But the last two years had witnessed a change in her would-be seducers. They had grown up, these males. She remembered always uncomfortably a young man who had burst into laughter during her outraged denunciation of him. He had said to her.

"Listen, girl. If I wanted you, all I would have to do is tell you to shut up and slap your face. And you would. Your 'how dare you?' don't go with me. I've known too many girls like you. But I don't want you. Not after this. If it'll do you any good I'll tell you now that I won't forget you for a long time. When-

ever I want a good laugh I'll think of you. There's a name for your kind. . . . "

And he had used a phrase that nauseated her. The incident had occurred on a Sunday evening in the hallway. He had reached up, taken his hat from the rack and without further comment walked out.

Fanny had spent the night weeping with shame. The memory of the young man's words made spooning impossible for a month. She was essentially an honest person and unable to do a thing she knew was wrong. Her only hope of pleasing herself and indulging her growing sensuality lay in remaining sincerely oblivious to what she was doing. As long as the man's words stuck in her memory it was impossible to remain oblivious. They had awakened no line of reasoning or self-accusation in her mind. Her mind was still conveniently blank. The youth's denunciation lay like a foreign substance in it, a substance which fortunately time was able to dissolve.

After a month of embittered virtue Fanny returned warily to her former tactics. She was cautious enough to begin with men as young as herself.

One night in April she gave her lips again. They had been making candy in the kitchen. She turned the light out as they were leaving. The young man stood in front of her in the dark. His arms went shyly around her. With a satisfied thrill, she shut her eyes and allowed the boy to kiss her. A languor overcame her. She ran her fingers through his hair and gently pressed closer to him.

The warning sounded sooner than usual, and in a surprising way. It came from within this time. The boy had not grown bold. He was enjoying her lips

shyly and his embrace was almost that of a dancing partner. Nevertheless the burglar alarm clang-clanged. Her body had grown hot. The impulse to crush herself against the boy, to open her mouth, to embrace him fiercely, throbbed in her, and bewildering sensations were bursting unsatisfactory warmths in her blood.

She hesitated. She might secretly yield to these demands. He would remain unaware of it and there would be no danger. But the alarm finally penetrated the fog of her senses. She was unable this time to shut off the current of her passion by the burst of sudden virtuous anger. The mechanism of her retreat had always been simple—a trick of turning her sensual excitement into indignation, of energizing the virtuous platitudes rigged up in her mind by the passion the caresses had stirred. The greater this passion, the more violently her pulse beat, the more violently the platitudes would clang and the more outraged her "how dare you?" would sound.

But it was impossible to say anything this time. Her hands pushed suddenly at the politely amorous youth. His embrace skipped from her as if it had been waiting for such a remonstrance. She stood with her head whirling. She felt limp and ill at ease.

"Don't you love me?" the young man whispered. The lameness of his voice would ordinarily have made her smile. But now the words seemed to draw her. She wanted to answer them, to say, "yes." For the moment it seemed as if she must confess she loved this impossible young man. She walked quickly out of the dark hallway. In the lighted room she was ashamed of herself. Her body tingled

with unaccountable pains. She managed to survive the evening without revealing herself. She was grateful for the youth's stupidity.

When she lay in bed she closed her eyes firmly and tried to sleep. But her body disturbed her. Sensations that lured and frightened played furtively throughout it. She lay stretching and sighing. Later, overcome with a nervous weariness, she fell asleep.

On awaking she remembered her triumph and felt proud. In retrospect the sensations she had felt and the temptations that had urged her seemed distasteful.

Years before she had rationalized her behavior toward young men by inventing a code. The code was based on the fact that hugging and kissing and the pleasure these inspired were in no way connected with "the other." When she thought of more intimate relations it was always in some such phrase. She was completely ignorant of the physiological mechanics of marriage. But her ignorance inspired no curiosity. She did not think of it as a logical culmination of the feeling embraces gave her. She had a definite attitude toward "the other." It was a thing separated from her numerous experiences by a gulf. There was only one bridge across—marriage.

Keegan interested her. Since the incident of the embarrassed young man with whom she had made candy in the kitchen, she had been secretly on the lookout for someone like him. She wanted someone with whom she could repeat the startling experience of that other evening without letting herself into danger. Someone who would remain oblivious to the passion his caresses aroused and so allow her to enjoy slyly the sensations whose memory had never left her.

She looked around the room. Doris had gone upstairs and George was not to be seen. Her mother was reading behind a large table.

"Tell me, why are men bad?" she asked in a whisper. Her blue eyes were wide. An air of altruistic sorrow surrounded her. She grieved for men. The question appealed to Keegan. His eyes grew moist. He was unable to understand this impulse to weep. But somehow it was pleasant.

"They're not bad," he answered softly. "It's only that they don't realize till too late. If all women were like you, there would be no bad men."

"Oh, then it's the woman's fault?"

Keegan nodded but said, "Not exactly. It's like figuring which came first into the world, the egg or the chicken that laid it. It's hard telling whether women are bad because men have made them so or whether men are bad because women give them chances to be. That is, that kind of women, you know."

He felt elated at his tolerance. A few minutes ago he had been denouncing bad women in his mind. But now it pleased him to be broader. Fanny was looking at him with cheeks flushed. Her mother had risen.

"I think I'll go to church," Mrs. Basine said. "Do you want to come along."

"Not today, mother dear," Fanny answered. Keegan was on his feet.

"If you want to," he offered gallantly to the girl.

"I usually love to," Fanny sighed. "But I don't feel quite like it today. You go along, mother."

Mrs. Basine smiled and left the room. Fanny heard

her brother talking in the hall . . . "I think I'll go with you, mother." She listened to Keegan in silence, waiting for the outer door to close. Now they were alone except for Doris, upstairs.

"I know how you must feel about it," she said. "But I don't understand how a man like you or George can do such things. It must be awful." She paused, blushing and added in a whisper, "Horrible!"

Keegan nodded and felt overcome as he watched her shudder and draw her shoulders nervously together. He covered his face with his hands. This was, he felt, being almost too dramatic—to hide his face. But his virtue demanded dramatics. He wanted to talk facts now, confess facts. By denouncing what he had done during the night he would increase his present emotion of chastity.

"Don't," he said, "lets talk of it."

His eyes grew wet again. He was tired. If only life were as clean as this girl he was talking to . . . If only life were beautiful and chaste. And there were no sex. No sin. Men and women just sweet friends. But life was different. It was full of unclean things. He couldn't help it, what he did. He didn't want to do it. But life surrounded him that way with things unclean. He wept.

Fanny hesitated. Her face had grown colored and her nerves were alive. She must do something. Her fingers desired to caress Keegan's hair and she thought how nice it would be to be kissed by him. But she resolutely barred further thoughts from her mind. It was wrong to think about such things. Fanny's code would allow her to do nothing wrong—if she knew it. She leaned forward impulsively. He was sitting

on a window seat. Her hands touched his covered face.

"You mustn't," she said.

He was sorry for life, for its uncleanliness. He would like to go somewhere far away where clean clouds and a beautiful sea were just as God had made them. And there he would like to sit with this girl, their hearts beautifully sad.

She stroked his hair shyly with maternal fingers. He felt the caress and his heart melted. Its sin poured out leaving him exaltedly cleansed. Yes, she understood him, the ache of repentance in his soul, the nostalgia for cleanliness that hurt him so. She understood and she was telling him so with her fingers.

"Poor boy," she whispered because he was weeping. "I'm so sorry. You won't, again? Ever? Will you?"

"No," Keegan mumbled tremulously.

It was easy and exalting to confess and promise in this way, without mentioning anything by name. Just by sound.

"I'm so glad," she whispered, as if they were in church, "if I have done that for you. . ."

"You have," he agreed. "I feel like a . . . like a dog."

"Dont . . ."

Her fingers were playing over his cheek. She could be bold. A man in tears was harmless. She stood up with determination and sat down close beside him. She took his head in her hands and looking with clear understanding eyes into his, shook her head sadly.

"You need a rest," she whispered. "Here . . . rest like this."

She placed his head as if he were a child on her shoulder. Keegan's heart contracted with remorse at the innocence of the gesture. Her purity was something poignant. He closed his eyes and drifted into an innocuous satisfaction. This was a realization of his hopes for purity. He recalled with bitterness the filthy embraces of the night. How superior this was, how much cleaner.

"Wait a minute," Fanny murmured, a wholesome matter-of-fact maternalism in her voice, "you lie down and rest . . . like this."

She assumed the proprietory gestures remembered from her childhood when she had "played house" with little boys and girls, and guided Keegan to stretch his legs on the window seat. He grinned apologetically. Fanny sat down and placed his head in her lap, her hands gently caressing his hair.

"Now sleep," she murmured. "There's nobody in the house and you can get a good long rest."

Keegan shut his eyes. A blissful enervation stole over him. His heart felt grateful. She was like a mother might be. Everyone had a mother except him.

"You're so kind," he sighed.

He had known Fanny for several months only and had never talked to her alone before. But now it seemed to him she was his oldest and most intimate friend. Because she understood. He thought of her as a companion of his better self. The warmth of her lap soothed him. Unaware, he dropped into a half doze.

The man's head lying heavily against her body began to stir her senses. She made certain first that he was not pressing himself against her. No, he was

merely lying naturally. A tenderness grew in her heart. She murmured to herself, "Poor boy, poor boy."

This wasn't quite as it had been in the kitchen that evening. The murmur continued as her face grew flushed and she breathed unevenly. She wanted to stretch and sigh.

Keegan stirred. A fear came that he realized her sensations. He was playing possum. No. She watched his eyes open and noted their stare of filmy tenderness.

"You're so sweet," he whispered.

She smiled pitifully at him and said, "Rest. Just rest. I feel so sorry for you."

In fact, imposed upon the excitement which the pressure of his head against her aroused, was a feeling of Samaritan pity. However, she wondered without displacing this emotion of altruistic concern for the young man, how far she dared go. She wished that his hands would touch her but they would have to stand up for that.

"Oh!"

She moved Keegan's head gently away.

"I thought I heard someone."

Slipping to her feet she stared eagerly toward the door. Keegan straightened himself. He looked at her drowsily.

"It's no one," she smiled. Her eyes covered him with tender interest. He thought of some picture of a saint—Saint Cecelia or someone like that.

"Why don't you go up in George's room?" she asked.

She gave him her hand as if to assist him in a comradely way to rise. He stood up slowly.

"You don't know what you've done for me," he began, "you're so different . . . so good."

She smiled and made a pretense of assisting him further by passing her arm gently around him.

"I don't know what it is," he murmured. He stopped. His heart was hurting him with longing. He was unclean. But this beautiful saint would cleanse him, purify him. She was a part of life he desired—the clean things. But he was afraid. How could he after last night, how could he dare? She would certainly misunderstand if he touched her. She would think he was a scoundrel.

"Fanny," he whispered.

She looked at him with intensely tender eyes as a mother might regard a forgiven child. He embraced her, his hands resting only lightly on her back.

"Forgive me," he mumbled. "But everything's so rotten. I feel like such a cad after what I've done. You . . . you make me almost happy again."

His mind was pleasantly fogged. He was thinking of himself as a despicable sinner receiving mysterious absolution.

She said nothing but let herself come closer. She was adroit and he remained unaware that she had pressed herself tautly against him. He was concerned entirely with the purity of his caress. He read in her eyes and flushed face a forgiveness, an absolution. Her grip on him that had grown firm was the grip of a woman raising him out of the Hell in which he had wallowed. His senses, deadened by debauch, failed to detect the pressure of her clinging.

She could dare. An intensity came slowly into her nerves. She would like to move, to crush herself against him. But she managed to restrain herself. She began to weep.

"Don't," he whispered. "You mustn't. I'm . . . I'm not as bad as all that."

She managed to say, "Oh . . . I feel so sorry for you. It just hurts me to . . . to think of you like that. Promise me you'll never again . . . Please . . . Promise me . . . Promise me . . ."

Her words, despite her, grew wild. She raised her eyes feverishly and, tightening her arms, pressed herself to him. The man's harmlessness had betrayed her. She continued to weep, "Promise me . . . you'll never . . . be bad like that again . . . "

Her emotion reaching its depth sent a delicious sense through her. She embraced him for a moment. In the receding fog of her satisfied impulse she heard him answering, tears in his voice.

"You're so sweet . . . So wonderful. Oh, forgive me . . . I'll never be bad again . . . Forgive me . . ."

4

Judge Percival Smith was a fastidious gentleman who boasted of his age as a contrast to his virility.

"Sixty-two," he pronounced impressively. And he would wait for people to look at him in amazement, fortunately unaware of the fact that they had thought him at least seventy.

His wife had died when he was forty-six. She had never managed to understand him, chiefly because he had remained polite to her through eighteen years of marriage. She had grown to regard him with awe.

Her friends always referred to him as a gentleman

—a gentleman of the old school. This was because he had a deep voice and enunciated clearly and professed a consistent preference for the days when men were men and women were women.

His friends mistook the clarity of his enunciation for a clarity of thought—an error which found social vindication in the fact that he had been on the bench nine years. Aside from his consistent preference, his views on current issues were also those of a gentleman. Why, it was difficult to determine. But he supplied their identity himself by clinching his arguments with the question, "I don't see, sir, how a gentleman can think otherwise."

He was often considered old fashioned. But he was admired for this. In discussing religion he would say:

"I am not one to quibble with my Maker or with any of His holy decisions. I believe absolutely in the gospel of infant damnation. A religion with loopholes is not a religion. Either there is a God or there isn't. If there is and you accept Him then you accept Him. You do not argue with Him. I don't see, sir, how a gentleman can think otherwise."

Concerning women he would say:

"Women represent the finer things of life. Not for them the turmoil and strife of economic battle. Their function in the scheme of things is obvious, sir. They were placed in the world by a wise Maker in order to bring sweetness, purity and light to bear upon the strivings of man. A woman's hearthstone is her altar. No, they are not the equal of man. They are his complement. Man is gross. Woman is fine and sweet. I do not believe in any of these disgusting

ideas which seek to lower her from the altar she now occupies in the eyes of all gentlemen."

When he delivered himself of these utterances he managed always to give to them the certainty of a man who was pronouncing judgments. He was admired for this certainty. People who felt doubts in their minds were always pleased to hear the Judge make pronouncements. They felt that it was impossible that a man who spoke so clearly, whose eye looked so unflinchingly at one and whose manners were so perfect, could be wrong.

He might not be quite as modern as some folks but he knew what he was talking about. He was the stentorian and impressive interpreter to them of a world they understood. The ideas which flourished in this world were in the main dead or dying. But this fact only lent a further impressiveness to them and to him.

People who sought to argue with Judge Smith usually ended by stuttering and growing red-faced. They felt as they talked and watched his blue eyes narrowing and his lips tightening, that they were talking themselves outside of the pale. His silence became an excommunication. They read ostracism in his frown and began to fumble for words, trying to propitiate him in one breath while presenting their side of the case to him in another. But he was not to be deceived by this ruse. He would sit poised and grimly attentive like a man judiciously enduring the presence of blasphemy but under great emotional strain. When they concluded, it was frequently unnecessary for him to offer counter arguments. His opponents felt their defeat in the knowledge of his superiority,

not as a thinker, but his superiority as a man of inviolable standards, his superiority as a gentleman.

In eighteen years of close contact his wife had never penetrated the shell of certitude and personal elegance within which the judge moved. During their hours of intimacy he revealed himself as a man of normal passions. But even during these he was solicitous, unbending and a gentleman.

In the morning, dressed, his white napkin tucked under his ruddy face he would be again—Judge Smith.

She had tried several times early in their marriage to carry the intimacy of the bedroom to the breakfast table. He had listened to her endearments and furtive reminiscences at such moments with eyes seemingly incapable of comprehending and she had felt each time that her talk was obscene, and grown frightened.

Her death brought no perceptible change in Judge Smith's life. He continued a gentleman. His name appeared at intervals in the newspapers as having gone to Washington to argue a case before the Supreme Court. His friends felt on reading this that the Supreme Court was an institution perfectly fitted to him. It was hard to imagine anybody but a man who looked and acted like Judge Smith arguing a case in the Supreme Court.

The Smith home, a brownstone house in Prairie Avenue, was occupied by the Judge, his daughter Henrietta and a housekeeper. Henrietta had finished boarding school at nineteen. She had since then busied herself as an assistant housekeeper. At twenty-one she impressed people with being as naive and

fresh as a girl of seventeen. It was hard to think of her as in her twenties.

She was a round-eyed, round-faced child with fluffy blonde hair, a small-boned body and a general air of juvenile fragility. She talked very little but bubbled with exclamations of delight, excitement, enthusiasm, astonishment. These she was continually employing, regardless of their incongruity. She greeted people with delight, saying.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you! Isn't it wonderful?" And managed to scatter a dozen exclamation marks through the sentences. If one said to her, "Did you see Sothern and Marlowe last week?" she replied excitedly, "Oh no! I missed them! I'm so sorry! Aren't they wonderful?"

Asked for an opinion of a new hat she would exude the same exclamation marks in, "Oh! It's simply too adorable for words! I'm just mad about it!"

And to such a remark as, "I read in the paper the other day that President Roosevelt went fishing," she would offer a wide-eyed stare and exclaim, overcome with astonishment, "Why! Gracious! Is that so! Isn't that awfully funny!" And incomprehensibly, she would laugh as if overcome with mirth.

People regarded her as a charmingly vivacious, well-mannered girl. Her exclamations pleased them by lending an importance to their small talk—a small talk which constituted nearly the whole of their conversational lives. Her explosive banalities invigorated them. They said of her:

"Judge Smith's daughter is so alive. She's so fresh and young and so enthusiastic."

Henrietta thought her father the greatest and

most important man in the world. She called him "FATHer," stressing the first syllable in a manner that distinguished him from all other fathers. Her admiration satisfied the judge. He demanded of her only obedience, respect and chastity. Since she gave him these he looked upon her as a shining example of true womanhood.

To have searched for an inner life in Henrietta would have been difficult. She was unaware of any other Henrietta than the surface she presented. There was no secret calculation behind her manner. Her body at twenty-one was still as undisturbed by desires as her mind was by thought.

She was physically and mentally vacuous and the words that sometimes ran in her mind were parrotings of things she had heard. Her days passed in a pleasant maze of trifles in which she exhausted her energies. Her manner of enthusiasm and astonishment was sincere. In her exaggerated exclamations the energies of her youth merely found a necessary and utterly respectable outlet. Her banalities were too vigorous to be aught but authentic and original. They were the enviably correct flower of her personality.

The judge, however, had a side to his nature generally unsuspected among his friends. He was a drinker. He owed the resonant slowness of his speech, in fact, to the ravages of drink. His poise, his intimidating deliberateness were likewise the result of drink. His mind had been somewhat enervated and the spontaneity of his nerves somewhat impaired by thirty years of intensive drinking.

His words followed his thoughts slowly and his gestures were moments behind the commands of his

brain centers. This general slowing up, the result of nerve exhaustion induced by his orgies, was readily accepted by his friends as an impressiveness of manner.

In arguments he found himself frequently unable to follow the nimble phrases of an opponent. His resort to silence—a silence made seemingly pregnant by certain mannerisms such as a tightening of his lips, a drawing down of his nose, and a narrowing of his eyes, which were actually an effort to ward off a sleepiness continually hovering over him—this silence was a successful substitute.

Mainly the judge kept his orgies to himself. During his married life he had adroitly covered them up as business trips—cases in other cities. His habit was to start off at his club, to sit among a half dozen men whose type he found agreeable and drink slowly during the early part of the evening. The talk would gradually veer from politics and legal discussions to women and anecdotes. In these the judge excelled. His fund of obscene stories was amazing. He related them with relish and was proud of an ability to talk several dialects such as German, Irish, Yiddish, Scotch and Swedish.

Among his club cronies his drinking and alcoholic waggery in no way reflected upon his status as a gentleman of absolute respectability and discretion. In fact they enhanced it. Among the judge's friends were lawyers of repute, financiers, and owners of large manufacturing plants. They were men usually past fifty. Their comradeship was based chiefly on their recognition of each other's prestige.

The publicity that had attended their lives gave

them all an identical stamp, a self-consciousness. They felt themselves instinct with power, and bent the greater part of their social energies to appearing democratic. They desired, as much as they desired anything, the flattery which lay in the comment, "Oh, he's very democratic. Just plain ordinary folks." They felt an exciting inference in this criticism. The inference was that, considering their power and superiority, one had to marvel at the fact of their dissimulation—their democracy. Thus they relished always lending themselves to projects, to situations which earned for them the awed avowal of inferiors that they were "just folks."

A certain shrewdness as well as flattery which inspired them. They were aware that people often preferred confessing the superiority of their betters by admitting in awe that "after all, he's just like us, in many respects."

On occasions when a group of them gathered at their club they stepped partly out of the characterizations of great men which they affected during most of their day. Drinking, taking their turns telling stories or pointing up incidents by the "did you ever hear the one about the Swede who went to a picnic with his best girl" method, they always welcomed Judge Smith. They were inclined to overlook a few things in his favor. If he did seem to have an unnecessary fund of smutty tales, there was on the other hand the fact that he was a judge and therefore above the anecdotes he told. Like the judge, they too were men with firmly rooted convictions on the subject of morality and if they laughed at stories over their highballs that flouted decency and made a mock of virtue there was

this exonerating factor to be considered. Men sure of themselves and subscribing unflinchingly to the uncompromising standards of conduct necessary to maintain the morale of the community, such men could without danger unbend among themselves. For morality was in its deepest sense, the protection of others and not of one's self.

As the group thinned out on such occasions Judge Smith would rise and in the manner of a man returning to the higher and more important duties of life bid his fellows good-night.

"A very pleasant evening, gentlemen," he would pronounce. "but duty calls."

He would bow stiffly. Long drinking had made him master to an astonishing point of his physical being while under the influence of drink. Bowing, he would walk with dignity from the room, emerge into the street and enter one of the cabs.

A half-hour later would find him disporting himself in one of his favorite disorderly houses. Here with the aid of further drink the judge became a curious spectacle. He was generally hailed in the places that knew him as "the wild old boy". And his arrival although greeted with enthusiasm was a matter of secret chagrin to the landladies of his acquaintance.

It was his habit to indulge in filthy insults, hurling astounding obscenities at the half-drunken inmates. He would frequently become violent and throw bottles around, break mirrors and electric bulbs and smash chairs. It was difficult to grow angry with him at such times because he covered his violences and insults with a continuous roar of laughter as if they were actually the product of a vast Rabelaisian good humor.

His insults, the obscene invective he hurled at the partners in his orgy, were a curious phase. They were the product of a process of projection. His normal mind, still alive under the paralysis of alcohol, pronounced these outraged denunciations of his behavior against himself. His virtue and decency cried a savage disgust and he must rid himself of these cries, find an outlet for his self-revulsions, if he desired to continue the debauch which was also an outlet for things inside him—things that slept too violently under the repressions of his shell.

Thus he rationalized his two selves by giving voice to the terrific protests of his virtue. Simultaneously he hid himself from their object by fastening the insults that poured into his thought upon those around him. The women explained among each other in their own words that he was a filthy old man and ought to be ashamed of himself.

5

It was afternoon. Mrs. Basine listened to Judge Smith explaining the new moving pictures that were being shown at the vaudeville theaters.

"It's all part of the craze for new things," he was saying. "and these awful pictures are merely a fad. There is nothing of basic appeal for Americans in them and they'll die out in a year or so."

Mrs. Basine was always impressed by the judge. He had three days before been on one of his debauches. His manner as a result was heavier and his words slower. After one of his wild nights the judge sought to efface the memory of the uncleanliness by heightening his personal appearance. He would in-

dulge himself in Turkish baths, facial massages, hair shampoos, manicures and changes of linen during the day.

The sight of himself immaculately dressed, spotless, his face, collar, nails and shoes shining, gave him a feeling of reassurance. Clothes and appearance had more and more become a fetish with him until he had developed into a fop. There was a certain passion in his demand for cleanliness. A disordered tie would mysteriously depress him. A spot on his trousers or shoes would preoccupy him until its removal. Once while on his way from the theater he had been splashed by a horse. Unaware of the accident at the time he had gone to a restaurant. There he had noticed the condition of his clothes. The mud had reached as high as his shoulder. A nausea overcome him. He hurried to the lavatory and cleaned his clothes.

His daughter admired her father for his fastidiousness. She looked upon all other men as somewhat sloppy in comparison.

"It isn't just that father dresses well," she said, "but he's so particular about everything. About his plates and forks, and his bedroom must be bright as a new pin. Oh, it's just wonderful for a man to be thoroughly clean like that."

Although the judge had spoken to Mrs. Basine it was her son who answered.

"I saw the pictures at the vaudeville the other evening," he said, "and I quite agree with you, Judge."

The judge nodded pleasantly. He liked Basine and had already prophesied a future for him. Henrietta was informing Doris of the trouble they were having with the church choir.

"Dr. Blossom," she was saying, "is just absolutely at his wits' end. We can't get anybody . . . anybody at all that's at all suitable."

"Mrs. Gilchrist and Aubrey are coming over," Mrs. Basine remarked to the judge. She was unable to keep a sound of pride out of her voice.

"A very fine woman. An exceptionally fine woman," he answered. Mrs. Basine nodded.

Basine sat down beside his sister Doris. He was interested in Henrietta. The news of her approaching engagement had exhilarated this interest. He had been a half-hearted wooer himself when he first came out of college. As she rattled on he was thinking, "She has nice eyes. She probably doesn't love Aubrey." He thought of Aubrey. A putty-faced, swell-headed fool. He could put it all over him, even as a writer, if he wanted to.

"I hear," he said aloud, "that you and Aubrey are engaged or almost engaged."

"Why the idea! Gracious!" A disturbed giggle. "Where on earth did you hear that! Father hasn't announced it yet."

"A little bird," smiled Basine. Doris looked at him and frowned.

"What do you say we pop some corn," he announced.

One of Basine's most engaging facilities was an ability to reflect in his own words and actions the character of those to whom he talked. Judge Smith regarded him as a young man of stable ideas and profound seriousness. Henrietta looked upon him as a charming, light-hearted youth who was able "to play." There were others to whom he appealed separately

as a young man of culture, modern to his finger tips; as a man of pious kindliness; as a man interested exclusively in politics, in economics, in literature, in women. His pose was seemingly at the mercy of his audience. He did not deliberately seek to make himself agreeable by presenting exteriors acceptable to his friends. His proteanism was in the main unconscious. It was the result of an underlying desire to impress men and women he knew with his superiority.

He had found instinctively that a short cut to such impression was not contradictions but agreement. But he would not merely say "yes" and please his listener by subscribing whole-heartedly to the ideas or points of view under discussion. He would take these ideas and points of view and develop them, show with a sincere creative enthusiasm why they were correct and how astoundingly correct they were.

He was usually cleverer than the people with whom he agreed. This made it possible for him to develop their ideas, to add to them, supply them with nuances and far-reaching overtones of which their originators had had no inkling. When he had finished they would find themselves warmly applauding what he had said, admiring his sanity and intelligence.

It was no longer Basine who agreed with them. They agreed with Basine and each of them went away saying, "A remarkable young man. Full of very fine, worth-while ideas and able to express himself."

They were conscious while praising him that they were also praising themselves. Although they were unaware of the adroit theft committed by Basine and unable to follow the way in which he filched their little prejudices and inflated them to noble propor-

tions with his cleverness, they felt a kinship with the young man. Their inferior egoism did not demand recognition as collaborator. They were warmed with the emotion of being *en rapport* with someone whom they admired. So often clever people were people with whom, somehow, one had little or nothing in common. But Basine was a clever person with whom everyone seemingly had everything in common. And they were delighted to have things in common with a clever man.

There were occasions on which Basine's cleverness was put to a difficult test. These came when a number of people, each of whom knew him differently, to each of whom he had identified himself as a champion of divergent opinions, assembled in his presence. Basine, it usually happened, was the friend in common and therefore the pivot of the vague debates which sometimes started—the awkward exchange of half-remembered arguments which constituted the intellectual life of his friends, as the make-believe of "playing house" had constituted their adult life when they were children.

But at such times Basine revealed his interesting talents as a compromiser, fence straddler, pacifier. Without espousing any of the sides presented, without denial or affirmation, he managed to convince the assembledge that he was a champion of all and detractor of none. He pretended a worldly tolerance, saying such things as:

"Well now, there are always two sides to a question. And a man who closes his mind to either side is likely as not to find himself in the dark. What Henning says is interesting. I can entirely understand it and

see the reasons for it. He sees the thing in a clear, definite manner. Yet what Stoefel says is also interesting and, of course, entertaining. I don't mean that I believe two sides to a question can both be the right sides. But it's my experience that there's an element of truth as well as of error in both sides. And I'm not so convinced that Henning and Stoefel actually differ. Often people meaning the same thing get into violent arguments because they misunderstand each other."

In this way he would convince both his friends that they were both men of intelligence, which is more flattering than being merely men of intelligent views. And, what was more important, he would give the listeners the impression of a calm, deliberative Basine, not to be taken in by the tricks of prejudice and speech which caused men to knock their heads together in endless argument.

Henrietta accompanied him into the kitchen in quest of corn to pop. Doris remained behind, staring disinterestedly at the judge who was talking to her mother. She had noticed something about the man that displeased her. She kept it, however, to herself. When he shook hands with her he assumed a paternal manner. He said to her:

"Well, my dear child, and how are you today? Serious as ever, I see. I understand that you and my little girl had quite an interesting time at the choir practice Saturday evening. Dear me, you will both soon be grown up and young ladies before I'm aware of it."

He talked with a kittenish banter in his voice as if he were patting a child of five on the head. But he

held her hand during his entire speech and his soft finger tips pressed moistly into her palm. It was hard at first to detect but after a long time Doris understood. Fanny had told her in an unsolicited confession that young men did that when they wanted to be familiar with a girl. It was a familiarity which only bad girls understood. Fanny added that a number of nice men whom she never would have suspected of such a low thing had done that to her hand but that the way to get the better of them was merely to pretend you didn't know anything about it.

Doris, disgusted by her sister's chatter, had remembered Judge Smith. The judge always did that, . . . moving his finger tips as if he were unaware of the fact. This afternoon he had done it again. She had never been able to see the judge as her mother and brother saw him. To Doris there was something intangibly repulsive about his flabby, smooth-shaven face, about his shining linen and deliberate manner that impressed everybody. She did not resent the things he said. To these she was, in fact, indifferent. But the man's personality awakened a revulsion in her. She did not explain it to herself. She was aware only that she felt uncomfortable when he looked at her and that when he beamed his kindliest or boomed most virtuously, she felt like sinking lower in her chair and contorting her face with shame, not for herself but for him.

Basine and Henrietta had returned to the room. A grate fire was burning wanly. Basine, squatting down like an elated boy, arranged a cushion for her.

"Oh, we've forgotten the thingumabob," he exclaimed, "come help me find that."

Henrietta skipped excitedly after him. Moments like this were dear to Henrietta. Looking for thingumabobs, planning popcorn feasts, having lots of fun and in a way that was intelligent. In the kitchen Basine searched for a minute and then turned to the girl with a laugh.

"I wanted to ask you something," he said. "That's why I lured you out again."

"For heaven's sake! Gracious! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, George Basine!"

She laughed with him. The thought had occured to him that it would be interesting to take Henrietta away from Aubrey. He didn't want her himself for any particular purpose. She was not a girl one could seduce, or even desired to seduce. And marriage was miles from his head.

Yet he had once held her hand while sitting on her father's porch and whispered idiotic things to her. He had made love to her, said to her, "Henny dear, I'm wild about you." It annoyed him to think that Aubrey Gilchrist would marry her, would appropriate her as if the things he, Basine, had said and done were of no possible consequence. In addition he had always disliked Aubrey.

"Henny," he said quickly, he had called her Henny two years before, "are you really in love with Aubrey?"

Henrietta made a face and swung her shoulders like a child embarrassed.

Like Keegan, he was physically tired from his night's debauch. But in Basine there was no impulse to repent. As he stood looking at the girl he grew curiously sensual in his thought.

The consciousness of his deadened nerves was an irritant to his vanity. He was always doing things he felt disinclined to do, as a result of his constant work of idealization. Also, to follow one's impulse and act logically was what everyone did in a way. If Hugh Keegan was tired he sighed and said so. But Basine, if he was tired, would laugh and suggest adventures. If Keegan or the others he knew were elated over something, they announced it, naively, like children. But Basine edited his elation and often pretended to be bored. And when he was actually bored he often pretended enthusiasm.

Such odd perversions had become a habit with Basine. Behind the confusion of purpose that inspired them was a certainty that in acting the way he did he distinguished himself from other people. Often no one was aware, of course, that he was acting, that his enthusiasm was the heroic mask of weariness. But Basine was enough of an egoist to enjoy secretly the emotion of superiority.

Because he was tired and because he would have preferred ignoring the trim figure laughing beside him, he deliberately took her hand and allowed his smile to grow serious. Now as he looked at her and saw her eyes soften, his vanity clamored for satisfaction. It was one of the moments in his life when his vanity most desired satisfaction, proof of the high opinions he held of himself. He was tired, bored and without impulses.

To dominate others, to possess himself of their regard and homage was the goal toward which he always built. Now the desire to possess himself of the

regard and homage of the girl whose hand he was holding came acutely into his thought.

"Henny," he whispered, "I'm sorry about you and Aubrey."

"Why?"

This was the sort of boy and girl scene at which she was almost adept. People held hands and even kissed without altering the correct social tone or content of their talk.

"Because," said Basine, "Oh well, because I love you."

The phrase stirred, as it always did, a faint emotion in his heart. He had used it frequently, even with prostitutes, and it had always given him a fugitive sense of exaltation. Walking alone in the street at night he would sometimes whisper aloud, "I love you, George. Oh, I love you so." He would have no one in mind whom he might be quoting at the moment. The words would come and utter themselves and give him a sudden lift of spirit. It was like his other self-conversation when walking along swiftly in the street he would would begin exclaiming under his breath, "Wonderful . . . wonderful . . . wonderful . . ." The word like his mysterious, "I love you, George" came without cause or relation to his thoughts and repeated itself on his lips.

Henrietta was staring at him. It was chiefly because she was surprised. She remembered that they had been friends once and held hands and that he had said things. But all that had been a part of a pretty game one played with boys, because they liked it and because it was rather likable in itself. She was surprised now because he looked sad. Sadness in her

mind was synonymous with seriousness. People were never serious unless they were sad. When she wanted to be serious she would always lower her eyes and arrange her expression as if she were going to weep. Then people understood that what she said was really truly serious and not just part of the game people were always playing among themselves. A game in which nothing was serious or funny or anything—but just was. Because that was the way it should be.

Basine was pulling her slowly toward him.

"Don't you love me?" he asked. "Don't you love me at all?"

He was talking aloud to conceal the fact that he had drawn her to him and was placing his arms around her. To do anything like that in silence would have frightened Henrietta. But to talk while one was doing it, that made it seem less definite. One could ignore what one was doing, ignore the hands pressing one's shoulders and the touching of bodies by pretending to interest one's self entirely in the conversation.

Basine knew this because he had made love to girls and taken liberties. As long as he kept talking and asking questions the girl would pretend she was so occupied in answering the questions and keeping up socially her end of the talk that she was oblivious to the liberties that were being taken with her.

Henrietta answered, "Why do you ask that? Do you really think you ought to ask me questions like that, George Basine?"

"Yes I do," he said, "why shouldn't I?"

"Oh because. Because you're engaged to Marion."

"Who told you that?"

"I know. Anybody could know that. Aren't you?"

"No more than you are to Aubrey."

"Gracious! Aren't you the clever boy. I declare! Engaged to Aubrey! Heavens, I'd like to know where you heard that."

"A little bird told me."

"It did not."

"Yes it did."

"You know better than that, George Basine. I wish you'd tell me really."

"Why should I."

"I'd like to know, that's why. I think I have a right to know."

"Oh but I did tell you something. I told you I love you."

"Why, George Basine!"

During the talk Basine had moved her closer to him. His arms were tightly around her and he had kissed her eyes and cheeks between his questions and answers. The embrace had aroused no physical desire in him. He was irritated by the coolness of his nerves. He was irritated at his being unable to feel anything with his arms around a pretty girl. Usually the incident would have reached its climax with the half kiss he placed on her mouth. That was as far as good girls went. At this point they ordinarily said something like, "Listen, I want to tell you something. I almost forgot." And gently detaching themselves from one's arms, continued to talk in the same tone they had used during the embrace about some event that had occurred during the week.

And then one returned to the sitting room and went on talking casually as if nothing had happened. It

was the height of bad taste to remind a good girl today that one had kissed her yesterday or to presume upon it in any way. It was the height of bad taste also to resist when they gently pushed one away and said , "Listen, I want to tell you something. I almost forgot."

Basine knew the simple technique of these virginal intrigues. Henrietta's hands were pressing him. This was the signal to release her and pretend that nothing had happened. Ordinarily Basine would have complied. He had no interest in the girl. His original impulse to take her from Aubrey had slipped from his mind.

But he had grown sad. The mild sensual moment he would usually have experienced in the embrace had been missing. His tired nerves had not responded. Unable to exhilarate his senses he sought to make up for the failure by treating his vanity to an exhilaration. This exhilaration would come if the girl he was holding grew suddenly sad, raised wide eyes to him and in a shamed voice murmured, "I love you, George. Oh, I love you so."

He would make her do this.

"Oh, Henny. Why don't you love me? I want you so much all the time."

"Why George Basine!"

She had suspected something different about the game when it started. And this was different. Even with Aubrey it had not been as different as this. Aubrey's mother and her father had decided upon the engagement after Aubrey had been fussing her for a few weeks.

But this was different. George Basine was in love

with her! She had always liked him because her father said he was a fine, promising young man and because he knew how to play, and was really like herself in many ways. She wondered what she should do. She felt worried because she was afraid she would say something that wasn't right.

She couldn't ask him to let her go because he was only holding her lightly and she could move away if she wanted to. She thought his eyes were sad and she felt suddenly sorry for him. He had stopped talking and his eyes were sad. They were looking at her and they made her feel sad, too. Things were so different when one felt sad. Everything seemed to go away then and nothing remained. Everything went away and left one a little frightened. As if the world were unreal and everybody was unreal and nothing really was.

She was frightened like that now. Or at least she thought it was fear. Then she saw it was something else. Her heart had started to pound hard and her throat fluttered inside. No one had ever looked at her like this. So seriously. As if she were somebody very serious. It made her feel strange. She grew dizzy and her arms felt weak. She whispered his name and his hands crept over her cheeks. This thrilled her as if there were electricity in his fingers. And frightened her again. But it was nice. Like being a little girl, almost a baby, and falling into an older man's arms—her father's arms. She could almost remember being a little girl and lying in her father's arms.

"Do you love me?"

She would answer this time.

"Yes," she said. "Oh George."

She hid her face against his coat. Basine was careful not to embrace her. Her "yes" had given him an inexplicable moment. He had felt himself expand under it. In her unexpected submission—he had never dreamed of such a thing ten minutes ago—she became suddenly someone who was very rare and sweet. He was still utterly oblivious of her and had it turned out to be Marion in his arms instead of Henrietta the difference would have made no change in him. The thing that was rare and sweet was the exhilaration in his senses—a purely spiritual exhilaration. He enjoyed it as one might enjoy some unforeseen and startling gift.

He grew tender. He wanted to kiss the eyes and hair of her who had given this gift to him—the thing which felt so warm in his heart and tingled so pleasantly in his thought. He must reward her somehow for having stirred in him this delicious excitement, reward her for the sweet surfeit her surrender had given his vanity. For a moment bewildered by this inner desire to express the gratitude he felt, he stood trembling.

"Oh, I love you so, my darling," he whispered. "You're so beautiful."

It was her reward for having surrendered to his unspoken demand. It was an expression of the overwhelming generosity that choked him. He found in the saying of the words a sweetness almost as keen as her surrender had afforded him. To hear himself say to someone, "I love you," was mysteriously exhilarating. The thrill that accompanied his bestowal of largesse excited him to further experiment. He was not carried away but he relished the emotions between

them, the sense of having triumphed and the provoking sense of bestowing grandiose reward.

"Darling, tell me . . . please tell me—will you marry me?

"Oh George!"

"Tell me . . . tell me . . ."

He was acting now, making his voice dramatic, pretending uncontrolable longings. She must say "Yes." He wanted her to and she must. He did not want to marry her. The thought had never occured to him. But it would be unbearable now unless she said "Yes." He must pretend and act and make the thing end by her saying "Yes."

"Oh, I can't tell you, George dear."

"You must, please . . ."

He had decided now finally to make her. A contest of wills. If he wanted a yes there must be a yes. Because he wanted it. His arms crushed her. He fastened against her. He felt her resisting. There was still no desire in him. His arms were still dead. But he could brook no resistance. The fact of resistance was unimportant but the idea of being resisted fired him with a passion entirely cerebral. He would warm her into saying yes, stir her senses, make her yield and her head swim until she said yes.

"I love you. Please say it. Say yes."

Yes to what? Henrietta for an instant awoke from the confusions of the past few minutes. Her morality, training, code of life and all sat up like a wary censor and surveyed the scene. The censor nodded an affirmation. It was all right. Go ahead. With this affirmation her body took fire. The weakness she had been struggling against became a beautiful enervation

—a lassitude that swept her unresistingly forward.

She had never done this before. She struggled for a moment to recall the censor—the thing that had always directed her. But she seemed to have been deserted. She was alone with sensations.

Her virginal mind was unable to identify the excitement rising in her. She waited while his caresses grew bolder. Then in a panic, born of a dim realization, she flung her arms passionately around Basine and sobbed.

"Yes . . . Yes . . . Oh George . . . I will . . ."

She felt at once that she had said it just in time—that it would have been sinful to continue another moment without promising she would marry him.

Basine released her slowly. The incident abruptly was over. He had in fact lost interest in it immediately before she had spoken. The thrill had come, developed and gone—a spiritual exaltation which he had enjoyed to the utmost.

But now it was over. His vanity, surfeited, had withdrawn from the situation. He was surprised to find himself looking at the girl with utter dispassion, as if nothing had happened.

Inwardly he was amused. Such things were amusing, in a way. Moments in which one saw oneself as an outrageous actor, doing something ridiculous. It was like that now. Absurd. But it had been pleasant. Curious, how pleasant. However, that was over. Henrietta would of course forget about it. And he, he was prepared to return to the library and go on popping corn as if nothing had happened, absolutely nothing.

But Henrietta leaned weakly against his arm.

"Oh George, darling. Do you really love me?"

He answered out of a social respect for consistency and nothing else. He thought the question rather tactless. Of course he didn't love her and she should have known better than to ask it. It had just been a game they had played while looking for the thingumabob.

"Yes, Henny, of course."

Her eyes were wide and her lips quivered. She was looking at him as if he were doing something remarkable and she overcome with astonishment. For an instant Basine wondered why the deuce she looked that way. Then he felt an unexpected chill that he dismissed promptly with an inwardly reassuring smile as he heard her saying.

"Oh, we'll be so happy together when we're married. Isn't it wonderful, just too wonderful for words to be married—together. Oh George! I'm so happy . . . I love you so much. And father will be so . . ."

6

They had not expected Mr. Gilchrist to come. Mr. Gilchrist was an undersized, mild little man with greying sideburns. When he was alone he read a great deal.

He had made money in the selling of expensive furniture. He was part owner of a store in Wabash Avenue. It was generally understood that people with taste patronized the Gilchrist-Warren establishment.

He arrived at the Basines' with his wife and his son Aubrey. Keegan and Fanny had returned from a long walk. They and the judge, Henrietta, Basine and his mother and sister Doris all expressed surprise at see-

ing Mr. Gilchrist. There was always about Mr. Gilchrist the air of a museum piece—a quaint museum piece such as a keen but sentimental collector might delight in.

The exclamations of surprise embarrassed the little man and he stood fingering his sideburns and trying to smile in just the correct way. Mr. Gilchrist's arrival anywhere always precipitated this air of surprise. People said, "Why, Mr. Gilchrist! Awfully glad to see you! Haven't seen you for an age. Well! How are you?"

This was as if they were extremely surprised. But they weren't. They were merely annoyed, upset, vaguely hostile and condescending. And these emotions inspired by the innocent Mr. Gilchrist could be best concealed by the feigning of a correct social astonishment.

To the queries shot at him Mr. Gilchrist answered, "Very well, thank you. Thank you. Very well, thank you."

After greeting him with these exclamation points, people immediately forgot he was present. Mr. Gilchrist would sit the rest of the evening ignored by everybody and trying to the end to smile in just the correct way.

Inside Mr. Gilchrist were many little lonelinesses. His head was full of things he had read, of plots, of great characters, even of epigrams and biting iconoclasms. When people talked he did his best to be attentive. And if they talked about things that interested him—the Kings of France, the Italian wars of the fifteenth century, the topography of early Lon-

don and kindred subjects—his face would tremble with enthusiasms.

He would listen, his eyes questing eagerly for epigrams, for illuminating sentences he might contribute. But his unegoistic love for the subject would make him inarticulate. His eyes that had seemed about to speak of themselves, that had seemed laden with excited informations would close and a chuckle would come from his lips. The Caesars, the Borgias, the Medicis, the Bourbons, the Valois, Savonarola, Richelieu, the various Charles, Phillips, Williams, Henrys, the plumed headliners of history around whom had centered the hurdy-gurdy intrigues, the circus romances and wars of vanished centuries—these were the hail-fellows of his imagination.

But people seldom talked of these names. People were more interested in contemporary topics. He did his best to be attentive. But his thought played truant and before he knew it he would be going over secretly certain things in his head. Villon, Marlowe, Balzac, Dumas, Gautier, Suetonius—there was a rabble of them continually arguing and declaiming in Mr. Gilchrist's head.

He liked to half close his eyes and imagine what the great names used to have for breakfast, what the great names would say if he were to enter their presence or if they were to come into this room. He liked to bring up in his mind pictures of old Paris, London, Florence, Avignon, Vienna with their lopsided roofs, winding alleys, night watchmen and king's guards. He could sit a whole evening this way thinking, "then he came to an old Inn and there were lights inside. People drinking inside, telling stories and

laughing. The inn-keeper was a man named Simon. The curious stranger looked about him with an imperious eye . . ."

These words murmuring in his head would conjure up the picture and there would be no further need for words. He was content to sit in the old inn, noticing its quaint decorations, its quaint but romantic inmates. Adventures would follow, strange episodes, denouements, climaxes—all without words as if he were watching a cinemategraph. His attempted smile would remain—a smile that concealed the fact he was neither smiling at those around him nor aware of what they were saying. For he would only half hear the chatter of the room and now and then nod his head vaguely at some question that people were answering —as if he too were answering it.

He was almost sixty, and lonely because he knew of no one to whom he could talk. His wife in particular was a person to whom he never dreamed of talking. He had only a dim idea of what he wanted to say to someone. But all his life he had been hoping to meet this one who would be like himself. This someone would be a friend whom he could take with him into places like the old inn and the crazily twisting streets of old London or Paris.

His days and years passed however without bringing him this companion. And outwardly he remained a mild little figure with sideburns, kindly tolerant toward everyone.

When his dreams left him long enough to enable him to notice closely those about him, a feeling of sadness would come. He would feel sorry for the men and women he saw gesturing and heard talking

and laughing. He thought they must be like himself —looking for something. His faded eyes would peer caressingly from behind his glasses and he would make simple little remarks in an apologetic voice. He would ask what they had been doing and when they answered in their careless, matter-of-fact ways he would nod hopefully and appear pleased.

To see Mr. Gilchrist in the midst of his family was to be convinced of the plausibility of immaculate conception. It was difficult imagining Mr. Gilchrist ever having done anything which might have resulted in fatherhood. But more than that, it was impossible even suggesting to oneself that his wife had ever received the embraces of a man, had ever so far forgotten the proprieties as to permit herself to be trapped alone with a man.

Thus the presence of Aubrey, their son, became incongruous. And Aubrey himself helped this illusion. He was a young man who looked incongruous. He seemed like a hoax or at least a caricature. He had enormous feet and ungainly legs, large hands and pipestem arms, hips like a woman and a face capriciously modeled out of soft putty. His ugliness by itself would have been whimsicial—his protruding eyes, long pointed nose, uneven cheeks and bulbous chin hinted at something waggish.

But Aubrey had triumphed over his physical self. He had with the aid of a pair of large glasses from which dangled a black silk cord, and by holding his head thrown back as if there were a crick in his neck, acquired an air of dignity. It was his habit to glower with dignity, to stare with dignity and to preserve a dignified inanimation when he was silent. He was

pigeon breasted and this helped. In fact his many slight deformities seemed all to contribute somehow toward making him a man of inspiring dignity.

People had little use for Mr. Gilchrist, his father. He was, of course, wealthy but not wealthy enough to earn the regard of the poor. They discussed him, saying, "He's not so simple as he pretends he is. Any man who's made a pile like old Gilchrist in the furniture business has a pretty smart head."

And they added that they wouldn't be surprised if something eventually were found out about old man Gilchrist. He had a past. Of this people were convinced. It was his wife's position and the fear of her personality that protected Mr. Gilchrist from the downright attacks of rumor. Any man who pretended to be as kindly as Mr. Gilchrist and who talked so tolerantly about everybody and everything was, you could bank on it, a sly rogue afraid to say what he thought because he himself was guilty of worse sins than those under discussion.

Mr. Gilchrist, by seeming above the social agitations surrounding him came to appear as one who looked down tolerantly upon inferiors—and this annoyed people. Who was Mr. Gilchrist and what had he done that he should be giving himself airs? Of course—there was Aubrey and . . .

Aubrey was aloof and dignified. But that was to be expected of a man who worked with his brain all the time, inventing plots and characters—his friends explained. In fact Aubrey's silences thrilled them even more than his talk. They felt, when he sat silent, that they were witnessing the birth in his head of some great idea which they would later read in a

book. Aubrey was a man of superior qualities and to bask in the presence of a superior was to partake of his superiority.

Aubrey's superiority consisted, so far as Aubrey was concerned, of wearing the proper kind of eyeglasses, keeping his neck stiff, refraining from giving utterance to all the asininities which crowded his tongue and writing romances containing heroes with whom a half-million women readers had imaginary affairs every night and heroines whom another half-million men ravished in their dreams. For Aubrey was a celebrated popular fiction writer. To conceal the horrible reasons which made for the celebrity of Aubrey's fiction, the army of literary morons who succumbed to its influence grew louder and louder in their protestations that Aubrey was a great moral writer. They pointed out that here was a man whose heroines were pure, whose heroes were noble and virtuous—neglecting to add that these were the only kind of phantoms which could penetrate the guard of their own puritanism and stir the erotic impulses beneath.

Aubrey's superiority was, for the most part, a state of mind that existed among the people who knew him or had heard of him or read of him. And this attitude toward him became part of Aubrey. He adopted it as the major side of his character and lived chiefly in the opinions of others. His introspection consisted of reading press notices about himself and thinking of what other people thought of him. Thus to understand Aubrey it was necessary to go outside him and to investigate this external state of mind, the ready-made robes of purple in which his little thoughts strutted through the day.

The people in whose acclaim Aubrey robed himself were varied and many but they inhabited an identical psychological stratum. They believed firmly that all artists and writers were poor, starving, unhappy creatures.

This belief was borne out in their minds by history —such history as they permitted themselves to know. History was continually telling of geniuses who died in garrets, of great minds that could not make enough money to feed or clothe their bodies. In fact one of the shrewdest ways to tell whether a man was a genius—that is, had been a genius—was to determine whether he had been neglected during his life and died of malnutrition and disappointment.

The people who acclaimed Aubrey found a compensation in this. They liked to assure themselves that geniuses starved to death. This compensated them for the fact that they themselves were not geniuses. It made them feel that it was actually a vital misfortune to be gifted, since being gifted meant to suffer the neglect of one's fellows and the pangs of hunger.

But the knowledge that genius was neglected and hungry in no way inspired them to remedy the situation by recognizing its presence and feeding it. To the contrary they were determined to see that it remained neglected and hungry. The idea of struggling long-haired poets dressed in rags pleased them. The idea of long-haired painters living on crumbs in attics gave them peculiar satisfaction.

Geniuses were people different from themselves. They believed in different things and pretended to be excited by different emotions and lived different lives.

And the people who acclaimed Aubrey were pleased to know that there was a penalty attached to being different from themselves and they were interested in seeing that this penalty was not removed. By penalizing the different ones whom they sensed as superiors, they increased the value of their own inferiorities.

Yet they acclaimed Aubrey and there was no malice in their acclaim. This was a phenomenon that had once startled Aubrey. Long ago, when he had first started to write, his family's friends had said, "Poor boy, he'll starve to death. There's no money in being an author and you lead a terrible life."

But Aubrey had gone ahead and remained an author. He had written, at the beginning, rather biting if sophomoric things, inspired by the malice he sensed toward his profession. But the inspiration had not been sufficiently strong to handicap him. When success had come and his name was emerging, the people who knew him and who had talked maliciously about his trying to be an author, were the first to acclaim him. This thing had confused Aubrey. He had felt that the public was a curious institution and he had for a few months wondered about it.

People sneered at struggling writers and referred with withering humor to art as "all bunk" and indignantly denounced its immorality. Then when one put oneself over despite their sneers they turned around and congratulated one as if one had done something of which they heartily approved. It was as if they tried to make up for their previous attitude, and for a few months Aubrey cherished a cynical image of the public. It was a great bully that spat and snarled at

genius, refusing to recognize it and making it a laughing stock wherever it could. But as soon as genius came through, this same bully of a public turned around and prostrated itself and worshipped blindly at its feet.

Then Aubrey had spent the few months wondering why this was so. But he had become too busy to do much thinking. His publishers were demanding more work—so he let other matters drop. His curiosity had carried him to the brink of an idea and he had somewhat impatiently turned his back on it. He had felt that to think as he was thinking about people who were praising him and buying his books, was to play the part of an ungrateful cad.

The idea that had come dangerously close to Aubrey's consciousness was the curious notion that people resented acclaiming anybody like themselves. The lucky ones who secured their hurrah became in their eyes no longer normal humans but super-persons about whom they were prepared to believe all manner of mythical grandeurs. The more remarkable and more superior people could make out their heroes to be, the less humility they felt in worshipping them. And since their heroes were creatures in whom they recognized a glorification of their own virtues, the more self-flattering it was to increase this glorification. They were able to worship themselves with abandon in the splendors they attributed to their chosen superiors.

Thus when they started they went the limit, heaping honors and honors upon a man until he became a glittering God-like person. The country at the time of Aubrey's ascent was full of such glittering God-

like 'creatures' whose names were continually in people's mouths and in their newspapers. The instinct of inferiority demanding, as always, an outlet in the invention of gods, had found a tireless medium for this hocus-pocus in the press. Great reputations were continually springing up—the newspapers like the half-cynical, half-superstitious priests of the totem era busying themselves with creating towering effigies in clay and smearing them with vermillion paints. These gods whom people busily erected and before whom they busily prostrated themselves were, as always, the awesome deities created in their own image.

There had been a crisis in Aubrey's life when he was caught between a desire to be himself and the desire to be a great clay figure with mysterious totems splashed over it. To be himself he had only to write as he vaguely thought he wanted to write. And to be one of the great figures he had merely to write what he definitely knew would win him the respect of others.

The decision, however, had been taken out of his hands. Aubrey's talent had not been of the sort that has for its parents a hatred of society and a derision of its surfaces. He had, indeed, fancied himself for a short time as desiring to adventure among the doubts and iconoclasms which distinguished the literature he had encountered during his college days. But the fancy had proved no more than an egoistic perversion of the true impulse in him. This, it soon developed, was a desire to impress himself upon people as their superior, not their antithesis.

As a result he fell to writing books which carefully

avoided the revolt which the dubious spectacle of manners and morality had stirred in him. He concentrated upon crystalizing his day dreams. He turned out tales of deftly virtuous Cinderellas who provokingly withheld their kisses for three hundred pages; of débonnaire Galahads with hearts of gold who, utilizing the current platitudes as an armor and a weapon, emerged in grandiose triumphs with the stubborn virgins thawing deliciously around their necks. Aubrey's tales were popular at once. They were the technically arranged versions of the rigmarole of secret make-believes that went on in his own as well as other people's heads. People read them and quivered with delight. They were tales which like their own daydreams served as an antidote for the puny, unimpressive realities of their lives. Also they were moral, high-minded tales and thus they served as a vindication of the codes, fears, taboos which contributed the puniness to the realities of their lives.

Aubrey's success increased rapidly as he abandoned altogether the pretence of plumbing souls and gave himself whole-heartedly to the creative pleasantries of plumbing the soap-bubble worlds in whose irridescence people found their compensations. At twenty-nine Aubrey was becoming one of the glittering God-like personages in whose worship the public finds outlet for its inferiority mania and simultaneous concealment therefrom.

He had realized this in time and without conscious effort adjusted himself toward the perfections demanded of a personage worthy of receiving the masochistic and self-ennobling salute of the mob. These perfections were simply and easily achieved. One had

only to acquiesce, to accept the acclaim of outsiders as a part of one's self and to live one's inner life in a roseate contemplation of this acclaim. One had only to "remember one's public" as he put it himself, and not to disappoint them or antagonize them.

In his own family he was regarded with awe. His father always felt bewildered when he spoke to him. And even Mrs. Gilchrist revealed a slightly human nervousness in her contacts with her son.

Concerning Mrs. Gilchrist there was not much to be said, even by such incipient iconoclasts as Mrs. Basine. She was too defined an exterior. One was conscious in her presence not so much of a woman as of an invincible battle-front of ideas. Nobody had ever heard Mrs. Gilchrist give expression to anything which could remotely be identified as an idea. Nevertheless she was a battle-front.

She was a woman with an intimidating coldness of manner. This manner spoke without words of an incorruptible intolerance toward all deviations from her code. Backsliders, moral culprits, unmannerly persons and, in fact, everyone not actively under her domination were, to Mrs. Gilchrist, suspect. She managed to give the impression that people whom she did not know were creatures whose virtues as well as social prestige were matters of sinister doubt. They were outside the pale.

The secret of her domination was a psychological phenomenon that eluded her antagonists and so left them powerless to combat it. The strength Mrs. Gilchrist felt within her was the product of a complete repression. She had managed since her youth to shut herself successfully within the narrow limits of her

consciousness, successfully divorcing all her thoughts, desires and actions from any dictates of an inner self. She had formed an ideal, basing it upon her social ambitions and her childish prejudices of good and bad, desirable and undesirable. And she had been able to perfect this ideal. Her mind was a tiny fortress against which her own emotions and hence the emotions of others battled in vain. It could neither think nor understand and this was its strength.

The doubts which thinking sometimes stirred in the minds of her antagonists, the knowledge of secret impulses and obscene imaginings which they were able only imperfectly to keep from themselves and which made it possible for them to appreciate dimly the sinners and iconoclasts in the world—such knowledge never intruded upon Mrs. Gilchrist.

Her indignation toward backsliders and moral culprits was not a projected censure of similar weakness in herself. There were no windows in the tiny fortress in which she lived. Protected from all human disturbances of her spirit, she spent her days closeted within her little fortress in grim contemplation of her rectitude.

Friendship was impossible to her. She was, however, a duchy, a corporation in which one could buy stock. By subscribing unquestionably to her rectitude, admitting its existence publicly and succumbing to its strength, one earned the dividends of her social approval. One became to her a very nice person in whose submission she grudgingly saw, as in an imperfect mirror, the image of her own virtues.

Curiously enough, Mrs. Gilchrist was renowned for her activity as a philanthropist and charity work-

er. Her social prestige, aside from her strength of character, was based upon this. She was a perennial patroness, a member of hospital boards, a chairman of bazaars, special matinees, charity balls and money-raising campaigns. All these activities were in the interest of the poor. The money raised by them went toward bringing comfort to creatures whose moral obliquity and human weaknesses Mrs. Gilchrist authentically despised. Yet she was indefatigable in her work, darting in her unvarying black dress from meeting to meeting, bristling with magnificent plans for further philanthropies.

Her husband occasionally wondered. He was unable to reconcile the coldness he knew in his wife with the character of her labors. At times he dimly felt that it was her way of saying something—perhaps a way of showing a hidden warmth toward people.

But in Mrs. Gilchrist's thought there was no such explanation.

To have admitted to herself a concern for the creatures in whose behalf she devoted her energies would have been to open a door in the tiny fortress, or at least to create a loophole out of which she might look with sympathy upon the confusions and torments of her fellows.

Her inner humanism, divorced from the narrow limits of her consciousness, was finding its outlet, as her husband suspected, in her work. But during this work never for a moment did Mrs. Gilchrist think of the creatures she was benefiting. She had rationalized her activities and made them a part of the emotionless content of her mind.

All relation between the things she did and the

people she did them for was divorced in her thought. In bazaars she superintended, in balls, fêtes, campaigns, auctions she energized with her presence, she saw only bazaars, balls, fêtes, campaigns and auctions. She worked for their success with an invulnerable preoccupation in the details which went to make them socially proper and financially triumphant.

The altruism of her work inspired no altruism in her. She did not allow herself to sympathise with the weakness and poverties she was aiding or even to contemplate them for an instant. Yet her work accomplished, the charity a success, she experienced the stern elation of "having done good." This elation was inspired in no way by the thought of the solace she had brought to others. It was entirely egoistic—a moment in which her rectitude congratulated itself upon—its rectitude.

7

Fanny Basine smiled timidly at Aubrey. He was paying little attention to her. He was listening to Judge Smith airing his views on the annexation of the Philippines.

The judge was forcibly declaring that the thing was essential and that no gentleman with his country's future at heart could possibly believe otherwise. Aubrey, to the judge's secret discomfiture, somehow managed to convey an assent to these views, but an assent based upon superior motives. What these motives were Judge Smith was unable to fathom. Aubrey, when it came his turn to expound, further irritated the judge by revealing them. He, Aubrey, was for the annexation of the Philippines but only because

he was convinced such an annexation would be of supreme benefit to the natives of the islands.

Mrs. Gilchrist nodded sternly in agreement with her son. The rest of the company listening with vacuous attentiveness waited for the debaters to continue talking for them. Basine who had been silent came to the judge's rescue. He explained that the judge and Aubrey meant practically the same thing but that they had chosen different ways to express themselves.

"Judge Smith," Basine smiled, "sees in the annexation something which will benefit his country. He knows as well as any of us that it will not benefit it financially. It will be a source of expenditure and strife. Then how will it benefit us? Because it will give us an opportunity to aid a pack of uncivilized and benighted heathen and despite them to bring peace and prosperity to their own country—not ours. Which is exactly what you mean, Aubrey."

The judge beamed approval and Aubrey contented himself with a stare of dignity. He did not relish psychological interpretations of his words. As an author, he felt annoyed. But Basine continued to talk undeterred by his stare. He disliked Aubrey. Not so much as Doris. And in a somewhat different way. Further, the presence of Henrietta was a curious inspiration. The girl's wide-eyed tenderness had irritated and frightened him after the incident in the kitchen when they had gone searching for the thingumabob. Now he had no interest in the Philippine controversy. But he had entered the discussion in order to rid himself of the uncomfortable memory the episode with Henrietta had left him. As he talked the memory played hide and seek in his words . . .

"She thinks I'm going to marry her . . . but she's engaged to him . . . she's crazy . . . what the Hell did I do it for? . . . Damn it . . . damn it . . ."

Instinctively he took the judge's part, as if he must establish himself firmly in the father's good graces in order to make premature amends for the jilting of his daughter. The position he had taken pleased him because it also involved an opposition to Aubrey.

Fanny continued to smile at the novelist. Keegan bored her. They had been walking together and she had lost interest in the sensual game she had been playing with him. Alone, she might have tried to repeat the experience of the morning with Keegan. But her physical curiosity partially gratified for the moment by the surreptitious excitement she had derived from him, her interest transferred itself to Aubrey.

The man amused and impressed her. Her thought separated him into two people. She resented his persistent dignity. Her perceptions, sharpened by the practical sensuality of her nature, saw through the little ruses by which Aubrey converted his slight deformities into a dignified whole. As she listened to him she said to herself, " . . . he thinks it's smart to wear a ribbon on his glasses . . . he sticks his chest out . . . he's got skinny arms . . . he looks funny . . ."

After a half hour she lost her resentment and the thing that had inspired it came to amuse her. She could see through his funny manner so it didn't anger her. But although now she smiled with amusement at the man's impressiveness, a feeling of awe pene-

trated her. Aubrey was a great man. People spoke his name everywhere. He was known.

A delicious tremble passed through her. She was careful not to translate it into words. Had she inspected the tremble and its causes, it would have outraged her. She was content always to accept her emotions blindly for fear of having to forego them if she knew their causes. She kept herself intact in her own mind as a good girl not by belligerently repressing her impulses but by enjoying them secretly outside her mind.

She had thought of Aubrey as a great man and with it had come the inner impulse to be embraced passionately by him. Not because he was Aubrey, but because he was the famous Aubrey Gilchrist, whose name was known. To be embraced by a famous man would be like being embraced somehow by all the people who knew his name. She would be able to think while satisfying her desire, "Everybody knows him. They know all about him. It's almost as if they knew he was doing this . . . I was doing this."

Then, too, there would be a feeling of intense secrecy about it, a sort of blasphemous secrecy. When an ordinary man kissed her, that was of course, a secret. But if a famous man should kiss her, a man like Aubrey, that would be a super-secret. A violation of something remarkable. It would be a thing concealed not merely from her family and from the vague circle of friends who might be interested, but from millions of people who knew Aubrey and who would be tremendously interested in everything he did. She would be giving herself to a public figure and yet the thing she was doing would be marvelously concealed

from the public. And so she would be able to enjoy the thrill of demonstromania—of being taken by someone who was not an individual like Keegan but a man who was part of other people's minds—and at the same time she would be able to enjoy the thrill of defiant intimacy; the knowledge that the people in whose minds the name Aubrey Gilchrist was alive would be ignorant of what she was doing to the man they admired. All this would be a sharpening of pleasure by the consciousness of wholesale deceit, wholesale intimacy.

These intuitions whose articulation would have been entirely unintelligable to Fanny sent the delicious tremble through her body. Immediately the two separate Aubreys of her mind focussed into one and she lost both her amusement and her awe of him. She sat regarding him with a timid smile designed to arouse his curiosity. As yet he had ignored her, his eyes seeking out Henrietta when the annexation debate waned.

Basine had diverted the talk into literary channels by inquiring, apropos of nothing, whether anyone had read a book by a man named Meredith. He had found it in Doris' room one evening and glanced through it. Seeking now for further material with which to discomfit Aubrey he had remembered the volume. He took it for granted that since his sister Doris had been reading it, the book was a very worthwhile book—the kind he cared nothing about reading himself. This did not interfere with his utilizing an exposition of its merits as a weapon against Aubrey.

"I was quite surprised," he explained. Doris listened with a frown. She was certain her brother had

not read the book and the knowledge he was lying aggravated her. She knew he lied continually but was indifferent. But to have him lie about something she admired, even in its defense, made her uncomfortable as if he were trying to establish false claims upon her regard.

"The book is altogether unlike most books," he went on, generalizing carefully. His mind, totally ignorant of the subject he was discussing, was shrewdly inventing a book diametrically opposite in style and content to the books Aubrey wrote. By praising such a book he would manage without reference to his antagonist to disparage his entire literary output.

He was not clear in his mind why Aubrey had become an antagonist. The memory reiterating itself behind his words " . . . she think's I'm going to marry her . . . damn it . . ." was mysteriously finding outlet in an indignation neither against himself nor Henrietta, but against the unsuspecting Aubrey.

Fanny listened to the new conversation, but Meredith was soon dropped . . . The sight of Mrs. Gilchrist grimly poised opposite her mother, became a part of the lure Aubrey exercised over her. He was the son of this hard-faced, domineering woman. To do something with him that was intimate would be a deliciously concealed violation of the mother's propriety. Fanny had always been intimidated by Mrs. Gilchrist's propriety. Embracing her son would be a sort of revenge.

Without wasting time looking for reasons, Fanny felt Aubrey as an attraction. Her attitude toward him grew more intimate. She did not try to enter the talk but adjusted herself in the chair, placing her body

so that the curve of her hip and leg were effectively visible to Aubrey.

And while the others talked she assured herself of the plausibility of her amibtions. Aubrey was a great man and very famous and distinguished. But he was after all entirely human. He had written books and Fanny fell to thinking about them, about the descriptions of love-making which crowded the pages of his books. Aubrey was famous and therefore aloof. But the things that had made him famous—the love passages in his books, were not intimidating. She remembered them with gratitude. They were love descriptions and Aubrey had written them.

Love passages were in fact all that Fanny usually remembered of her reading. Plots and characters escaped her. After she had closed a book there remained in her mind merely the scenes in which men had placed their arms around women and whispered after a succession of exciting adjectives, "I love you."

This was due to the manner in which Fanny read. As a girl she had ploughed laboriously through a set of Shakespeare in quest of obscene passages. Her girl's eyes would skip with irritation the speeches that seemed to her extraneous until, caught by some "nasty" word, she would become eagerly interested and carefully digest the sentences preceding and following it. At fourteen she had discovered that the dictionary, stuck away in a dusty corner of the book case, was filled with many such words. Whenever occasion permitted she opened the big volume and poured intently over its contents, digesting with excitement the definitions of what she called to herself, the nasty words.

The result of this curious reading technique had gradually shown itself as she matured. Literature became to her a secretly immoral and indecent thing. She would blush when people mentioned *Shakespeare* or any of the books in which she had eagerly browsed. Observing that her blushes gave people an impression of her sensitive chastity, she developed a habit of seeming offended at the mention of any volume she suspected of containing such words and passages as she was continually searching for in secret.

She would say, "Oh, I don't like that kind of a book. I don't think people should write like that—about such things. There are so many nice things to write about I don't see why people must write about the others."

Delivering herself of these sentiments on all occasions, she continued her furtive hunt for books about "such things." One red-letter evening she stumbled upon a pamphlet in her brother's room describing the horrors of venereal diseases and outlining with verbal and pictorial illustrations the ravages wrought by the disease germs. She had devoured the information greedily, her sensuality editing the well-intentioned brochure into a mass of erotic revelations.

Aubrey's books, although a bit too innocuous to exhilarate her as the pamphlet had done or even the dictionary, properly read, was able to do, contained innumerable passages she remembered. She treated his writing as she did all writing, skimming hastily over irrelevant matters such as dialogues between men, discussions of abstract problems, mother and child scenes and coming to a pause only at the portions which began with some such sentence as "He

looked at her with burning eyes," or, "She felt nervous because at last she was alone with him," or, "He tried to draw her to him but she resisted, her virtue outraged by the light in his eyes."

She recalled these passages now as the literary discussion grew warmer. The knowledge that Aubrey had written them served to humanize him and remove his aloofness in her eyes. He was a famous man. On the other hand he was famous because he wrote such things as, "She yielded with a happy sigh to the manly embrace."

Aubrey felt irritated with Basine. He stood up and seemingly without intention walked to a vacant chair next to Fanny. The conversation had been taken up by Mrs. Gilchrist who was explaining the real purpose of her visit.

"We are giving a fête on Mrs. Channing's lawn," she was saying, "and I would very much like you to be one of the members of the committee on printing."

Mrs. Basine felt an elation at the words. She had read about the Channing lawn fête. An affair of social magnificence designed to raise funds for the Associated Charities. Great social names were involved. Mrs. Basine's heart trembled gratefully.

"Oh, thank you," she said, her voice taking on a formal, artificial tone. Mrs. Gilchrist nodded. The tone pleased her. She could count on the Basine woman among the select who showed their gratitude openly at the largesse of her favor. She would, in fact, deign to stay for supper as a reward.

Mrs. Basine, urging her to remain for the light Sunday evening meal, felt indignant with herself. She would have preferred to refuse the committee on

printing. Even as she accepted and experienced the elation her thought bristled with revolt.

"The old fool . . . the 'old fool," repeated itself with annoying clarity in her mind. She detested Mrs. Gilchrist. Since her husband's death Mrs. Basine had outgrown the snobbery which had inspired her during her life to pour over the society columns. But a habit had been established, the habit of a desire to become a member of the closely knit organization known as Society. And now she was apparently powerless to overcome this desire which no longer animated her but yet intruded out of the past. She looked down upon herself for the elation over becoming a member of a printing committee for a social charity fête.

"I hate it . . . I just hate it," she would murmur for days at a time. But the elation would persist, a thing beyond the control of her improved outlook upon life. She was aware also of the simple process by which she transferred her self-indictment into a detestation of Mrs. Gilchrist. Mrs. Gilchrist was the one who appealed to what Mrs. Basine had grown to regard as her "smaller nature." And her anger toward the imperturbable dowager was the anger of a virtuous woman toward one whose temptations she was unable to resist.

"You've been rather silent." Aubrey smiled patronizingly at Fanny. She nodded.

"Oh, I've been so interested in what you've been saying," she answered. She noticed with a feeling of sisterly gratitude that Basine had occupied himself with Henrietta. Aubrey caught the direction of her

glance and frowned. He had developed a definite dislike of Basine during the afternoon.

Keegan, listening uncomfortably to the judge who was ignoring him in his talk but whose audience Keegan felt it a social necessity to remain, tried vainly to capture Fanny's eyes. She had apparently forgotten his existence. But now as Aubrey seated himself at her side, she smiled intimately in the direction of the confused Keegan.

"Oh, Hugh," she said loud enough for him to hear.

The sound of his name from the girl gave Keegan an inexplicable sensation. He felt himself break into happy smiles and the anxiety that had been growing in his heart seemed abruptly to have vanished under her voice. He came to her side and stood looking timidly at her. The conviction came over Fanny that Keegan was in love. She felt pleased and her heart warmed toward him. But her interests remained exclusively preoccupied with the novelist.

"I was just going out to the kitchen and wondered if you wanted to help cut sandwiches," she smiled at Keegan.

"Sure," he answered.

"I'm an excellent cook myself," Aubrey unbent gravely.

Fanny stood up and started toward the hall. The two men hesitated and then followed her. Basine, frowning slightly toward the door, listened to her voice chattering to cover the embarrassed silence of the two men she had bagged.

"Don't you want to go out there and help," he turned to Henrietta.

She shook her head.

Keegan felt himself being slowly transported. His penitence had faded into less satisfactory emotions toward the middle of the day. A gloom had come over him and his heart had felt weighted. He had at first identified this state of mind as a ghastly premonition of disease as a result of last night's debauch and thought that the depression he felt was his nervous system or something warning him of this fact.

The depression lifted. He sat around the Basine home listening to the chatter of the arriving guests and feeling out of place. He felt that he was wishing for something but couldn't make out what it was. His heart hurt, his head felt heavy. There were aches in him and a feeling of listlessness. More, he couldn't sit still. The room seemed a suffocating place. He was unhappy.

Several hours later it dawned on him with a shock that he was in love with Fanny. The sudden explanation frightened him. He attempted to deny it to himself. The struggle endured a half hour. He surrendered.

When he looked at Fanny again she had undergone a complete change. There was a startling intimacy in her features. Her contours were stamped with an appeal he had never observed before in a woman. The rest of the company sat behind a thin film of politeness and formality. But Fanny sat with him outside this film. The others in the room were blurred as if half hidden. Fanny was distinct. A light seemed to beat upon her. He looked in amazement.

A few hours ago he had noticed nothing. Now he noticed everything . . . her dress, her hands, her hair, her eyes, her ankles. He was frightened be-

cause it seemed as if someone had invaded the secret world in which he alone lived. He remembered frightenedly that he had lain with his head in her lap, that he had embraced her. There had been something curious about the embrace but he was unable to indentify it.

"She felt sorry for me, that's all," he thought and at once all hope ebbed out of him. Yet he continued to look at her and watch her grow more familiar, so familiar that her image seemed to have come into his heart where he could feel it choking him.

A few minutes after entering the kitchen he grew hopeful. He found himself in the position of an intimate—at least by comparison. She was paying no attention to Aubrey. She laughed at his, Keegan's, clumsiness, chided him good-naturedly. She held his hand and, his heart beating wildly, directed him in slicing the bread. When he was drawing the water from the sink faucet she leaned over resting her chin on his shoulder and effected a humorous concern. He felt her body press warmly against him and almost dropped the cut-glass pitcher he was holding. He was being transported.

Out of the corner of his eye he watched the novelist. A sorry fellow with gawky feet and a clumsy-looking face. Keegan vaguely pitied him as he stood around doing his best to horn in on the intimacy between Fanny and himself. He knew how the novelist felt. It seemed to Keegan even that it was he, Keegan, feeling that way, and that the carefully concealed embarassment, the futile chagrin and lameness were his own emotions and not Aubrey Gilchrist's. In an effort to put the defeated rival at his ease, so Keegan regarded him, he tried magnanimously to include him

in the little byplay between himself and Fanny.

"Here, you try your hand at this," he offered, handing Aubrey the knife. Fanny pouted.

"Hm! Just as I was teaching you the art of bread cutting you run away from school," she complained. Keegan resumed his operations on the bread, a satisfied warmth in his heart. For her hand had returned to its position and she was again going through the idiotic pretense of teaching him how to move a knife. He was being transported. His vacuous face had taken on a vivacity. He was fearful of presuming, of doing something wrong, and he made no effort to caress her. No effort was necessary for, somehow, despite his carefully edited behavior, their fingers were always touching, their bodies coming together.

Still he was afraid to think that Fanny had fallen in love with him. He was even afraid that Aubrey would go away and leave them alone in the kitchen. If they were alone he would have to try to kiss her or something and she would laugh and then say indignantly, "You idiot, I was just playing. I see now that you think all women are like those you told me about."

He would rather that Aubrey remained and that everything continued as it was. The sandwiches were piling up on the large platters.

"Here," Fanny cried, holding one of them up for him to bite.

He looked apologetically at Aubrey as if asking to be forgiven for this proof of her superior regard and with a blush ate from her fingers. Fanny suddenly let go the sandwich and as it dropped to the floor, patted him tenderly on his cheek and laughed.

"Um . . . big man hungry," she whispered.

He turned to place the fallen pieces of bread in the sink. His hand brushed hers and he felt her fingers close firmly around his palm with a squeeze. He half shut his eyes at the shock that filled his heart. Fanny's eyes, however, ignored him. She was engaged in watching Aubrey for whose benefit the entire scene was being staged. Her instinct had supplied her with a mode of attack. She would arouse desire in the novelist by showing herself desired—although by another man. A desired woman was an irritant. It aroused illogical jealousy.

The icebox was in the back hallway.

"The cream and things are in here," Fanny exclaimed.

Keegan followed her out of the kitchen into the rear vestibule. She had squeezed his hand before starting and thrown him a glance as she passed through the doorway. He felt embarrassed for Aubrey and was on the point of inviting him to share the intimacy of the small vestibule. But Fanny interrupted him.

"Oh Hugh," she called softly, "will you chop some ice, please, for the water."

She handed him the ice pick and laughed nervously. The door was half open and Keegan caught a glimpse of the novelist pretending a vast interest in the arrangement of the sandwiches on the plates.

"What's the matter, Hugh? You seem so . . . so funny," Fanny whispered close to him.

His heart contracted. He was afraid. If he dared he would put his arms around her. But after all the things he had confessed to her in their walk . . .

A longing to weep almost brought tears out of his eyes. He stood with his mouth open and stared as in a dream at a blurred vision.

"Fanny," he muttered, "I'm sorry . . ."

"About last night," she whispered. He nodded.

"But Hughie, you said you wouldn't ever again . . ."

He felt despair.

"If I only hadn't . . . I would . . ." He stopped.

"Would what, Hughie?" Fear halted him definitely. He could go no further. A misery clouded his thought. He felt her hand touching his arm.

"You mustn't feel sorry, Hugh. Please promise me you won't feel sorry . . ."

The sweetness of her voice overpowered him and his eyes grew wet. He tried to talk but was ashamed of the quiver he felt in his throat. Fanny pressed lightly against him. He stood with his head reeling and his heart dancing crazily as her arms circled his neck. Her face was raised to his.

"Just one . . . Hughie. Please . . . don't forget. Please hurry . . ."

He heard her words but they conveyed no meaning. He loved her . . . he loved her. He had never been happy like this. He couldn't tell her now . . . the icebox, something, was in the way. But sometime he would tell her. His arms and body felt alive.

"Oh," he thought, "Fanny, Fanny . . . "

Then he heard himself repeating the thought aloud. He was saying in a voice he hardly recognized, "Oh, Fanny, Fanny."

He kissed her lips.

For a moment Fanny returned his kiss passionate-

ly. Her arms clutched him tightly. She felt a curious lift in her heart, a thing she had never experienced before. It made her almost close her eyes. But she kept them open, watching furtively over Keegan's shoulder the figure of Aubrey. Aubrey had remained bent over the plates of sandwiches. Despite the lift in her heart this annoyed her. She wanted Aubrey's attention.

"Oh," she sighed aloud. Aubrey heard. He straightened and for a moment stared at the tableau of the lovers. Fanny watching him behind Keegan's kiss saw his face grow red. Then she lowered her eyes and abandoned herself to the sensation of Keegan's arms. But the sensations faded. An interest seemed to have gone out of the situation. She pushed Keegan gently away and looked into the kitchen. Aubrey was gone.

"Oh," she whispered. Keegan looked at her dizzily, "He saw . . ."

"Who?"

"Aubrey Gilchrist saw you." Her face flushed.

"Did he?" Keegan leaned against the icebox. He felt weak.

"I'm sure he did," Fanny insisted, an elated note in her voice, "I'm just positive."

"He couldn't have seen much if he did, from where he was standing," Keegan murmured.

"I don't care anyway," Fanny smiled. Keegan felt a thrill at the words. She loved him and didn't care who knew!

"Neither do I," he agreed. He felt glad they had been seen. It made him blush inside but he was glad.

"Oh, what do we care?" Fanny cried, "if the old

stick-in-the-mud did see." Keegan reached his hands to her but she eluded him and darted into the kitchen.

"Hurry, chop the ice," she called. She was confused. For a moment she had been surprised by an emotion—a curious, unsensual desire for the awkward Keegan. She had felt her heart yield to his embrace as she usually felt her body do. But the whole thing had been for Aubrey's benefit. It had started with an intention of making Aubrey jealous by flirting with Keegan. And when Aubrey had refused to show any signs of jealousy she had carried the flirtation further until it had seemed logical to kiss and embrace Keegan as a part of her original ambition to stir Aubrey. But she had been stirred herself by the man's kiss. Yet now that Aubrey was gone she had lost all interest in Hugh. She wanted to hurry back where the novelist was.

She glanced apprehensively toward the door. Doris was standing looking at her.

"What's the matter, Dorie?"

"Mr. Ramsey has come. Mother said to set another place."

"Good heavens! What a houseful."

Doris nodded. Keegan was standing in the center of the room smiling inanely at the sink.

"I'll help you," said Doris.

8

Mrs. Basine was embarassed by the arrival of her friend Tom Ramsey. He had been a friend of her husband and a rumor had become current that he was now courting her. She denied this with indignation. To herself she admitted she liked to be alone with

him. He was a sour-minded man with a liver-red face, a patrician nose and the look of a man of importance. But he was too thin and too short to live up to this look.

In the presence of others he usually fell into a silence unless one of the two or three subjects on which he felt himself an authority came up. These subjects were things that had to do with advertising—effective copy, effective display, prices, results. Mr. Ramsey was in the advertising business.

Mrs. Basine's embarassment at his arrival was caused by her sympathy for the man and her resentment of his weakness. She knew exactly what would happen. Tom Ramsey would sit through the evening, scrupulously polite to everyone, saying, "Yes, yes. Quite right. Oh, of course. That's absolutely right . . . Indeed, I agree with you . . ."

For the first few minutes he would impress everyone as a man of character and intelligence. But gradually this impression would fade and people would stop talking to him and eventually ignore him altogether in the conversation.

Why this happened Mrs. Basine could never determine. But it did and it always hurt her. Mr. Ramsey, smiling exuberantly through the introduction, his thin body alive in the slightly overheated room, would in an hour become Mr. Ramsey sitting glassy-eyed and polite in a corner, his liver-red face holding with difficulty a grimace of enthusiastic attentiveness. He would make sporadic starts trying to recover something. When the talk grew boisterous and everyone was making puns and delivering himself of bouncing sarcasms, Ramsey would try to become part of the

scene in a way that always startled the company. He would come to life with mysterious suddeness and hurl a jest into the common pot. His manner, however, focused attention on himself rather than his words. In back of the drollery he offered would be a desperation, in fact, sometimes a sense of fury. People would stare at him for an instant thinking, "What an odd, impossible man." And in their contemplation, forget to laugh at his remark, forget even to answer it. And he would be left stranded in a silence—a conversational castaway. A moment later he would collapse, sit glowering in his chair, looking angrily at the carpet. This was painful to Mrs. Basine since she had grown to understand him.

When they were alone Ramsey became a different man. He talked to her usually about people he had met in her house. At such times he was master of caricature. Their absurdities, pompousness, banalities, hypocricies took grotesque outline in his words. His method was unvarying. It was based upon a crude, vicious skepticism, inspired in turn by a fanatic resentment of success in others. He seemed determined always to prove to his own and her satisfaction that despite their pretentions people were no more successful than he. His nature seemed unable to tolerate the thought of superiors. At the same time people he encountered, particularly in the Basine home, managed always to override him, to reduce him to silence, to deflate him.

He would retire into himself, protesting viciously at the injustice of this phenomenon. And while he sat in silence he would seek to wipe out the consciousness of his own inferiority by attacking with

contempt the people around him. He would sit belittling and ridiculing the company to himself until he had hypnotized himself with a conviction of their general worthlessness and inferiority. Bolstered up by this treacherous conviction, he would come suddenly to life with a grotesque sense of magnitude in his mind. He was a giant among pigmies, a Socrates among clowns! Who were these numbskulls and fourflushers that they thought they were better than he was! He would show them! He would step forth and by a single gesture, a scintillant phrase, reduce them to their proper place.

And the company would find itself staring for an instant at a thin, little man with a wild look in his eyes and a snarling quiver in his voice, saying something not quite intelligible—usually an involved pun or a tardy comment on some issue under discussion. The intensity of the sullen-faced little man with the patrician nose embarrassed them for the moment. Not as much as it did Mrs. Basine whose heart would almost break at the spectacle, but enough to make them feel it were best to ignore this curious Mr. Ramsey and not let on what a fool he somehow made of himself.

Ramsey's indignation toward people, his sour skepticism of their values, was his futile way of reassuring himself of his own worth. Futile, because he had no conviction of this worth. When he sat denouncing in silence the talkers around him, ridiculing and belittling them, it was merely a less painful outlet for the contempt he had of himself.

He had been since his youth ridden by this inner feeling that he was a fool, a weakling, not quite a

man. It had started in his boyhood when the nickname "Sissy" had been attached to him. His high-pitched voice, his thin body and his unboyish modesty had earned him the name. As he had grown older the fact that he did not care for girls as other youths did, and that he sometimes played with them as if he were a girl himself, had not escaped the keen, cruel eyes of his companions. The name "Sis" Ramsey had stuck.

In order to convince these companions of his masculinity he had thrown himself with violence into their roughest games. In highschool he had sought to establish himself as a hardened sinner—a drinker and tough citizen. Despite his slight body he had developed into a creditable athlete. More than that he had become known as a fellow who would fight at the drop of a hat. His fiery temper became a byword.

But all these masculine, or seemingly masculine attributes were part of his effort to prove that, despite his somewhat odd voice and his equally odd indifference toward girls, he was a man. When he left high school and started in the offices of the Mackay Advertising Company, the name "Sissy" had dropped from him. He had no longer to contend with the keen, cruel eyes of boy companions. Men were content to accept him at whatever value he chose to place on himself, as far as his character was concerned.

The struggle instead of abating, however, only increased. It removed itself from the external combat of his boyhood to an internal complication, and became the basis of the feeling of inferiority which shaped his life.

This inner knowledge he cherished, that he was in-

ferior to people, was founded on the conviction that he was impotent; or at least nearly impotent; that he could never marry and have children like other men. His mind refused to acknowledge this fact and thus instead of finding the comparatively harmless exit of regret, it permeated his entire thought with the word —inferior . . . inferior.

Ramsey kept himself desperately blind to the cause of this permeation. He concentrated on the detached word "inferior" and belabored it with untiring fury. There was another secret, one that went deeper than the hidden conviction of impotency.

In the indignation which continually filled his mind, the hideous secret that lived almost within grasp of his understanding was conveniently clouded. It was the secret that his lack of vigor—a fact in itself that he sometimes contemplated—was caused by a still deeper thing—a thing that never reached any clearer articulation than a shudder.

They had called him "Sissy" as a boy and he had not changed with age. He had been able to repress the impulses that sought to turn him toward men instead of women for companionship. He had repressed them by the ruse of convincing himself he was an ascetic.

It was, moreover, an attitude which could find outlet. He could devote himself to the continual denunciation of others, developing into a sour, cynical choleric man of fifty. A vindictive, unpleasing personality.

Mrs. Basine herded her guests into the dining room. Ramsey's presence preoccupied her. She found herself watching him as a mother might look after a sickly child.

The intimacy that had grown between her and her dead husband's friend had been too gradual to trace. It had started when Mrs. Basine had sat one evening in the midst of a company similar to this and thought, "Poor man. He jumps around like that and acts queerly because he's ashamed of himself. He's ashamed of not being what he wants to be."

She did not quite understand what this meant but she felt herself suddenly close to the man after having thought it. He began to seek her company alone and more and more to use her as an audience for his ruse of transferring his self-rage into a critical indignation of others.

A realization of Ramsey's character had stirred a pity in her and out of this pity she was careful not to let him see it. She went to the extreme of pretending a blindness toward his shortcomings and of accepting him for the thing he tried to make himself out to be —a giant among pygmies.

She would agree with him in his attacks upon others, second his vicious caricaturing and appear always impressed by his desperate skepticism. Ramsey as a result had come to regard her as the one person with whom he had ever felt at ease during his life. Mrs Basine was a woman who understood him, that is, one who was completely deceived by him. In her presence the creature he struggled unsuccessfully to become, the masquerade of magnificence which his inferiority sought futilely to assume—in her presence these became realities. He would swagger before her, deride her, browbeat her and the rage which bubbled everlastingly in him would have respite. His mind seemed to uncloud and his talk would grow actually

clever, some of his caricatures bringing an authentic laugh from her.

But the widow as a rule would sit listening to him, watching his swagger, her heart lacerated by the poignant things it sensed. It was as if he were a little boy dressed up in an Indian suit and emitting war whoops and she must sit by and pretend real horror of his juvenile make-believe; as if he were someone who would drop dead with anguish in the midst of his laughter if she were to say aloud what was in her mind, "Oh you poor man, I'm sorry for you. I'm so ashamed for you."

She did not understand why, despite these things, she felt a thrill of pleasure when she found herself alone with him. Her pity for the man seemed a pleasant excitement. It gave her a sense of intimacy toward him. She admitted this to herself but wondered about it.

There had been one evening that remained confusedly in her mind. He had seemed unusually buoyant, she recalled, after it was over. His cleverness had actually diverted her—his caricatures of Judge Smith and Mrs. Gilchrist and even her own son. She had felt a certain truth in the distorted descriptions he gave of her friends.

Then without warning he had grown violently excited. She had watched him with a fear in her heart —a warning to her that he was going to say something. She remembered him walking up and down the room saying, "The trouble with you, like with most people, my dear lady, is that you don't understand things. You look at things through a fog. You don't see through the pretences of people. Your brain isn't

active. It's merely receptive. It doesn't question. And what's the result?"

His voice had become high-pitched.

"You live your lives among lies. That's what you do. Lies, lies—you thrive on lies. Your friends are lies. Your thoughts, everything. Take me . . . Now take me . . . my case . . . I'll tell you something you don't understand . . . just by the way of proof . . . I'll tell you something . . ."

His voice had broken off, overcome by excitement. He was walking up and down in front of her, his eyes staring wildly. He was going to say something, something about himself. And for a moment she had sat cringing inside. Why had she been afraid? Perhaps because he had looked so wildly around him, like someone trying to escape. But he had grown silent and dropped exhausted into a chair.

She tried not to look at him because he was trembling and he had gone away ten minutes later. He had kept away for two weeks and then returned and their relations had resumed as if nothing had happened. Her mind tingled with curiosity but a fear restrained her. She somehow had not dared ask the question, "What were you going to tell me about yourself."

But she remembered that it had seemed for a moment as if he were going to escape, that he had looked like a man on the verge of ridding himself of an incubus.

Her guests were getting along famously. Everyone seemed pleased, happy. They were chattering and laughing for hardly no reason at all. Mrs. Basine had no liking for the people at her table. She

despised Mrs. Gilchrist, resented Aubrey. The judge gave her a faint feeling of repulsion. Henrietta was a simpleton. Fanny irritated her with her continual blushes and sensitive innocence. Doris was too silent and always brooding. And even George—he somehow failed to convince her although she desired to be convinced.

But all of them together were nice, like a pleasing combination of colors. People belonged together. Alone they had faults. But when they came together and forgot themselves they were nice. She felt proud of having them at her table, because there were so many of them. They were nice people when they were like this—just talking, not arguing or saying things that convinced her somehow that they were wrong things.

Under the table the little comedies of the day were playing a furtive sequel. Henrietta sitting next to Basine was shyly pressing her knee against his. Fanny had reached out her foot until it rested against an ankle she fancied belonged to Aubrey. For a few minutes she failed to connect the attentiveness of Judge Smith, his paternal banter, with her activity under the table. But the suspicion slowly arrived. Her eyes calculated the position of the judge's legs and, blushing, she withdrew her foot. She noticed that Aubrey sought her face when she wasn't looking and that Keegan was talking with a blurred politeness to Mrs. Gilchrist.

Doris sitting next to Mr. Ramsey felt annoyed. He was continually asking her what she wanted, passing her salt-shakers and bread-plates and conducting himself as if she were a helpless child under his care.

Mrs. Gilchrist, as the first conversational flush inspired by the food subsided, launched into a detailed description of the plans for the coming fête, talking in a precise, emotionless voice.

"I was saying," Basine's voice emerged in a silence that followed Mrs. Gilchrist's talk, "I was saying that people are easy to get along with if you understand them and they understand you. I had a case in court the other day where a woman was suing a man for breach of promise. He had proposed marriage to her and then without reason broke his pledge. The woman was my client."

Murmurs of "how awful"; "that must have been interesting" arose. Basine nodded sagely. He had without knowing why started improvising the narrative, inventing its details with a creditable dramatic and legal talent. There had been no such case, client or denouement but he continued unconscious of this fact in his desire to tell the story. "The man of course was a rascal. An unscrupulous rascal. The girl—my client—a charming, innocent young thing—had believed him. He had courted her passionately, —er, I should say—assiduously. I couldn't understand how any man after giving his word and asking a girl to marry him could possibly be rogue enough to do what he had done. So during a recess in the case I sought the fellow out. His name was Jones. We had quite a talk."

Basine paused.

"What happened?" Fanny exclaimed. "I wish you'd tell us more about your work than you do, George. It's so interesting."

"Yes, go on," Mrs. Gilchrist commanded.

Basine hesitated. His improvisation seemed to have come to an end. He was, mysteriously, at a loss as to how to make the lie turn out. But inspired by the attention of the table he resumed:

"Well, of course a lawyer must be first of all faithful to his client."

He paused again. He had almost decided to end the fiction by explaining that on investigation he had found the man to be right and that the defense the man had given him privately of his actions had caused him to withdraw from the case. But this would sound quixotic, unreal. There would have to be explanations. Why had he started the lie? To give it that ending so that . . . He smiled a sudden appreciation of what he was doing—trying to excuse his jilting of Henrietta—an event not far off if she persisted in holding him to the thingumabob foolishness. But he went on:

"This sometimes prejudices an attorney against his opponent. But I found this time that all prejudice was warranted. The man was a thorough rascal. It had been his practise to propose marriage to girls—innocent girls of course, and he had several times managed to take advantage of their faith in him and —ruin them."

Fanny averted her eyes. Mrs. Gilchrist stared with an uncomprehending frown at the talker. The judge permitted a grimace of distaste to pass over his face as he murmured, "The cad. Yes sir, men are cads."

"My client won," resumed Basine with modesty, "and was awarded five thousand dollars by the jury. But the law could not give her back the happiness this scoundrel had snatched from her . . ."

"Had he . . . had he accomplished his purpose with her?" Aubrey inquired, aloofly interested in the plot details of the narrative.

"No, fortunately," Basine answered. "But look at him now. Free, although found guilty, free to continue his tactics."

He paused confused. Henrietta was beaming at him, her eyes wide with admiration. He felt he should have given it the other ending and cursed himself silently for what he had done. He had only made it worse when he had meant to tell a story that would help matters and make her understand . . .

Mrs. Basine regarded her son unhappily. She was convinced he was lying because he usually mentioned the big cases he had and he had never before referred to any Jones suit. But she was unable to understand why anyone should lie without cause and after a moment of doubt her son's stern face and positive manner managed to convince her again. He wasn't lying.

Basine, as the others took up the discussion of the narrative, dropped his hand to his side and furtively pressed it against Henrietta's knee. At this sensation of physical contact a feeling of relief came to him. In the sensual thrill this contact aroused he buried the discomfort of the words running through his head—"she thinks I'm going to marry her. Damn it . . . damn it . . ."

He was startled when, glancing at her in the midst of his daring excursion under the table, he noticed her smiling coolly and primly at Aubrey who was talking.

"Will you have some of this?" Mr. Ramsey's voice protruded through the silence. Several eyes turned

toward him as if he were about to take up the burden of the talk. Mrs. Basine interrupted quickly.

"What was that book you told me about, Mr. Gilchrist, last month?" she asked. Aubrey looked up inquiringly. "I mean your father."

The elder Gilchrist blinked and seemed to peer into the depths of his memory.

"I don't remember," he said clearing his throat. They were the first words he had spoken since he had said, "Thank you . . . thank you . . ." and sat down in a corner of the Basine library. His wife stared at him as if he were a phenomenon unexpectedly revealed to her gaze.

"It must have been," stammered Mr. Gilchrist, "Suetonius, I think. Or . . . or the Chevalier de Boufflers . . ."

"I'm sure that was it," Mrs. Basine agreed. "I must get that to read."

The judge frowned disapprovingly upon the elder Gilchrist. He resented readers. Culture was a state of soul acquired by being a gentleman, not by reading books. He resented also the impression Aubrey had left during the Annexation discussion.

As a matter of fact he felt sleepy, the result of the food he had eaten. And he was automatically seeking for some occasion which would warrant an expression of dignity or resentment or anything in which he might hide his heaviness of spirit.

The sight of his daughter regarding Aubrey with a sweet, prim attentiveness supplied him with what he desired. The idea of Henrietta marrying that fool was annoying. Old Gilchrist was a sly dog and his wife a difficult woman. He would forbid the thing.

It might hurt Henrietta for a time but he knew what was good for her. A mere story writer had no real standing in the community, no future. Whereas—Basine . . . He lowered his eyes and glowered at his plate . . . Nice young man. Honorable. And full of promise . . . promise. . . .

9

"Love the stars. Love people's faces. Buildings and faces. What do I know about 'em? God knows. Rotten streets . . . Life's a great harlot that men keep chasing. That gives herself to men—all men, everybody. I want her. I want her."

He walked angrily, a cap on his head, a pipe clenched between his teeth. He was thinking as he walked. Emotions came out of his heart and burst crests of words in his mind. Angry emotions. There was an anger in him. He was overcoming a feeling of futility as he walked.

The street was a carnival fringe. Cheap burlesque theatres, arcades, museums, saloons. This was blurred. He saw no lithographs. One side of the street followed along at his elbow—a slant of pinwheel lights. On the other side across the street, pin points. But he saw nothing. Things passed unresistingly through his eyes.

He remembered now a mile of walking. The business section asleep on Sunday evening. He had walked through that. Darkened windows, ghastly inanimations. Why was he angry?

"Aw huh!" he snarled. He was cursing something. He asked questions and answered them. This got him nowhere. Stars, buildings, faces—he wanted to knock

them over. That was inside him, a wish to knock 'em over. More than a wish. A necessity. But he could only walk. The world scratched at his elbow. He could bite on his pipe. This thing hurt him.

People, rotten people. Crazy jellyfish with jellyfish hearts, jellyfish brains. He could swear at 'em like that. But why? He didn't know. Only this thing in him made him blow up.

It was easier when he worked. His father calmed him. His father stood over the bench planning the fine-grained wood. A great man because he loved the wood he cut and carved into pieces of furniture. But jellyfish sat in the chairs they made in his father's shop. Damn 'em.

"Love people. Say something. What? Say something. Get it out. Aw, the dirty, filthy swine."

That was the way he thought as he walked. A long furious mumble in him, this man walked and saw nothing but light slants, spinning windows. He was young and he wore a cap.

He would get it out of him . . . Show 'em! Ah, a nip to the air. Spring blowing his heart up like a balloon. All they wanted was women. And all women wanted was to be wanted. No. That was wrong. Damn! Always wrong! His feet talked better than his head. Clap, clap on the pavement. Where were the others going?

He didn't hate them. Someday it would all come out like swans swimming. Very majestic. He would talk easy and smooth. But now people kept him from putting it over. They wrapped him up. Ideas wrapped up his words and killed them. Streets, buildings, stars chewed at him. He must knock 'em over and

get himself free. Put his hands on things and knock Hell out of 'em.

"Love 'em. Love 'em. How the Hell . . . why the Hell? Lindstrum! Lindstrum! That's my name . . . I got a name. I'm the greatest man in the world. The world's greatest all-around individual on two legs walking, smoking, Damn . . ."

But what could he do? Saw wood, smear varnish on wood, monkey around with wood. That didn't get it out. When he wrote it came out. But rotten. He wrote rotten, crazy rotten. If he was the greatest man why in God's name! He'd show 'em.

A long breath brought the night into him like a sponge. It drained something out of him. He could grin. A very evil grin at a saloon window. He could look around and notice. That's what eyes were for. Look—people walking. Poor, sad, broken people. So sad . . . Ah, tired eyes in the street that looked for lights outside themselves.

"I'm going nuts. That's what—nuts."

But the mumble went on. Questions and answers in a circle, biting their own tails. God forgive them, all these people. He must do something. Arms around them whispering to their hearts something that would say, "Yes, yes. I know it all about you. How you think one way and feel another. And how everything ends. How everything ends in a little cry that goes up."

Love their faces. Damn it! Love 'em . . . He'd show 'em. He'd talk to the lights in the street. Why not?

"Do you know what? Do you know? It's all a humpty dumpty. Egg-heads falling off a wall and

smashing. But I know what. I got your number. Wait . . ."

There was something to say. Why? Damn it . . . not that way. Hit poor, sad ones on the head. Better the dirty swine in the City Hall. Aw huh! Wring their necks. What for? Wrong. Something else. They were like him. Brothers, everybody. You could kill the whole of them and there would be something left behind that was good—Life. But a better way than that . . . Don't hit. Arms around them, lips to their hearts and talk like that. Make the hyenas sigh. Make the jellyfish weep softly. Make the stars dance in their idiot thoughts. Sing them songs. If only the songs came out.

It was evening, spring evening in a dirty lighted street, and he walked biting his pipe. He said to himself, "What's there to this thing? Let us study it. Many people in many houses and many streets. And each of them a known thing. But when you take all of them together, that's an unknown thing. If you know me, if you know one—what then? Nothing. It remains only one known. There is still everything else to know. One man multiplied by a million isn't a million men but an infinitude of millions."

He would get the hang of them all though, all the millions. He would think it out, get his fingers on something that didn't exist for fingers to touch. That was art. It was easy when you figured it that way.

He walked along often figuring it that way and understanding something that had no words, living with something that was like a strange phantom in a great dark deep. This phantom was a stranger inside him. A phantom like an insane companion that had a way

of putting its arms around him, inside him, and a way of holding him like a horrible mother. Then when it did, he stopped calling himself nuts . . . nuts. He became silent then and vanished.

The phantom devoured him. All there was of him that everybody knew, that even he knew, all that vanished. The phantom devoured him and it was easy then. But the phantom let him go, took its arms off him, and he came back, out of the deep. Then he felt himself leaping up with a choke in his lungs, leaping through layers and layers with no surface to reach. He must go up, up from the easy embrace of the phantom and keep on raging, yelling out to himself that something had sent him shooting up.

Now he walked and it was easy. The night blotted out his eyes and he lived with himself down deep where the easy embrace waited. Such moments came when he walked and he must be careful. That was writing, being careful and watching the little words that danced high up and that he could watch when he raised his eyes from the embrace. Skyrockets far away, he watched them breaking in crazy spatters of light against the top of things where the sky came to an end.

He was thinking like that now. Lucid thoughts that he later stared back upon and wondered, "What the hell were they? I had something, what was it?" Now he was thinking them with this deceptive lucidity as if they were something. He was thinking how when he was younger, when he was a boy, he used to run down country roads. Apples trees and rivers and growing fields that sang at night were there. And yet, there was nothing. What did that mean? That was easy

to answer. There was nothing because it was all outside him in a marvelous way. When he was a boy long ago, so long ago, and he lay on his back and looked at the night and the night was nothing in his head, the night was a song that chanted itself to him. The stars were something he had spoken. Darkness was a sentence echoing off his lips. And the world was marvelously outside and it gave itself to him. The boy lying on his back handed the world to himself as a gift. There was nothing to want, everything to have. Long ago when he was a boy watching the day and night without thinking.

But it all went away. Now what was it? That was easy to answer. The night that had been a song chanting itself, the stars that had been his words dancing, the darkness, clouds, trees, river and roads, the fields and the people crawling with tiny steps under the cornfield sky—these went away all together and he couldn't find them any more. These things he had said without speaking, these all went away. Beautiful familiars, they misunderstood something in him and vanished from him.

That was long ago. Now he could remember them and his remembering them was like hearing them again. That's what made him angry. He could hear them as if they were calling, "Find us . . . find us . . ." And he said back, "All right, I'll find you. Wait. I'll come after you somehow. You're my old friends. I'll get you back. Christ knows how —but, wait . . ."

But this made him think he was laughing at himself, kidding himself. He knew better. The things that had gone away were in the faces of people, in

buildings, in lights, in streets under his feet. Christ! why couldn't he lay hands on them again since they came so close they choked him and made him howl inside with choking.

He was letting go now again. The easy embrace was shooting him up and he began to know again he was nuts. He hung on to himself a little by saying words . . . "Easy boy . . . Easy . . ."

He stopped walking for a second and a happy smile came to his set mouth. The smile said it was over. He was Lief Lindstrum again and nobody else. He could become calm like this. It was like blowing a fire out with a grin. His head was clear and he was happy. The street was like a merry-go-round. The night had a smell of life in it. That came from the lake. Whatever living might be and whatever the choke inside him was, a man was a fool to forget this other—the calm, grinning strength of muscles and the way his nose buzzed when he drew his breath in.

Now he was Lief Lindstrum walking to call on his girl. And he could think of others, the poor little others, the superfluous others. Only he didn't have to get angry at them. Or he didn't have to fall in love with them. It was just thinking straight. Well, the way men talked to each other was funny. The way they swapped lies was funny. Poor, rich, happy, sad, broken, bawling ones—they all made the same lies to each other. The government was a lie. God was a lie. And all the gabble about good and bad and what-not-to-do and what-to-do, and all the laws and everything beginning from the beginning and going ahead as far as you wanted, it was all lies. So many of them that all the philosophers had never been able to begin

straightening things out. And if somebody found out something true, what then? Well, they grabbed it and made it into a lie, pronto! used it as a lie. The poor little crawling ones on the earth made up lies to explain things but most of all they made up lies to keep alive. If they didn't lie to each other they would all fall apart and vanish because nature would have it that way. So they must go contrary to nature and keep on surviving. Nature demanded the elimination of the unfit. But it was the unfit that desired most to live. So the unfit made laws and rules and institutions, and inside them, protected by them, kept alive. So the will to live was the thing that created lies.

But the worst lie the little people told was when they called themselves life. That was the chief lie, the Grand Sachem and High God of all lies. Because they were not life. They were part of something inexplicable that altogether might be called life. But each of them separately was a dead one, a dead one buried deep in life. That was the difference about him, Lindstrum. He wasn't buried in life. There were moments when he shot up like a man shooting through layers of graves. The others let the thing called life pile up on them and it became a mystery of graves that reached to the farthest star. But with him there was no piling up. He would keep on shooting out of it till he had lifted himself up where there were no graves.

"Shh, shh," he murmured to himself, "lets not be nuts tonight. Plenty of nights for that. Lets talk about other things. About her."

Her face was beautiful. Dark eyes, dark hair, silent, that was like she was. The thought of her made

him grimace inside with pain. He wanted her as much as that. But what did he want her for? God knows. What does one want for? In order to get rid of wanting. Nothing else. Kiss her? Bah! She was a victory. He wanted her like that.

When he was near her they didn't have to talk or hold hands. They came together in a different way. She was so beautiful. . . .

"I love her," he said quietly. He wanted to be quiet so he spoke quietly. She was marvelous. He would like to cut himself up into bits and give himself that way to her. He would like to die a thousand different ways and say, "Here, I destroy everything I am in order to become a gift for you." That was like placing oneself on a burning altar—the ecstacy of the sacrificed one. That was it.

Some nights like this the world became too small to live in. The city swept away from his senses and everything in the city seemed like a room full of cheap little broken toys he had outgrown. He would sit in a room within this bigger room, a lamp on his table and write. Or he would strike out like this time and walk to her—miles across streets.

"I want her," he said. His thought paused. "But what do I want of her?" he asked. "I don't know. But I want to give myself to something."

And he began thinking over how many ways there were to die as a gift.

This lighted window was her house. The curtains were down but light spurted through the sides. The sight of the house with its light-fringed windows depressed him. It was a disillusionment. She wasn't a woman then like he was a man but she was a part of

things. He saw her as he walked up the stone steps, saw her talking to people. She had parents. In his mind she lived as an entity. A beautiful one without background or lighted windows or stone steps. Someone for him. Nobody else.

He rang. The door opened. A man like himself stood blinking in the lighted hall.

"Good evening," said Lindstrum. His voice was deep for his age. He spoke in a drawl that seemed edged with anger. "Is Doris in?"

"Oh, hello," Basine exclaimed. "Yes, she's in. Come right in."

People were talking in the next room.

"Company?" said Lindstrum. He didn't want to go in. But Basine was leading the way. The supper had ended ten minutes ago. The company looked up at him. They were all dressed well. Their faces were dressed well, too. They wore carefully tailored satisfactions in their eyes. When they smiled their mouths postured like ballet dancers in a finale. They were rich people. Their hands were soft.

The room blurred before Lindstrum. There was no reason for it now because he wasn't thinking or caring but a rage crept into his senses. He breathed in deep with his mouth opened and the feel of the air on his teeth and tongue made his jaw set. Because he would have to be careful what he said. Because he was saying inside to himself, "Damn 'em. The scum!"

His eyes brought pictures into his anger. They stared with deliberation into other eyes and brought back messages. He was being introduced. He was saying to himself deep down, "They're all alike. Like peas in a pod. They smirk and talk alike. And they're

all stuck on themselves alike. And they're all liars—damn liars, all alike."

He would have to take care and not argue. He would sit down. Doris was upstairs and she would appear in a minute. Then they would go for a walk and shake this room out of their eyes.

They chattered like monkeys. Satisfied with themselves. Yes, know-it-alls, tickled to death with themselves. An old man with a heavy pink face and sleepy eyes, a well dressed old man they called Judge—if he could punch this guy in the face, let his fist smash into his jellyface, God! what a thrill! A flushed girl, Doris' sister, wiggling her body in a chair. What she needed was somebody to grab hold of her and say, "Come on kid." A square, hard-faced old woman talking of society. What she needed was someone to walk up behind her and kick her hard. And when she raised her glasses to look, laugh like Hell and spit in her eye. That would make her human! And this smart-aleck Basine . . . Hm! What he needed was somebody to tie him to a stake in a dark prairie and let the wind and rain go over him till he got hungry and began to whine. That's what they all needed—wind and rain to bring them back to life.

But he must be careful and say nothing. There was Doris' mother. She wasn't so bad. But this other guy, this writing guy, talking about books! God! Why didn't somebody choke the life out of him! What did he know about books? And he talked about writing! What was good writing? He asked that, this guy did! He would have to be careful what he said to this guy and keep himself from jumping up and murdering him. Hell take all of them and make

'em burn. That's what they needed. He hated all of them. They were rich. Damn 'em! He must sit and grin at them, these jellyfish who wiggled in their graves and called their wiggles by great names, who were dead . . . dead . . . How dead they were! And happy about it! Happy . . . Didn't they know how dead they were?

Doris was like them. He was a fool for coming to see her. As if she were any different from them. She belonged with this filthy crew. She was a filthy little tart like the rest of them. Let her go to Hell. He'd tell her to go to Hell when he saw her. She was one he could talk to.

Uh huh, they were giving him the up and down. His shoes were dirty. His collar soiled. His clothes weren't pressed. That was the way with these dead ones, they made standards of their clothes because clothes were all they had. And their idea was to make people feel inferior who were inferior to their clothes or to their manners or to their other artificialities. But he didn't have to feel inferior if he didn't want to. He was the kind who could stand up in a graveyard like this and say "Go to Hell" to the pack of them and grin and walk away and forget all about it.

He noticed they looked at him not quite as they looked at each other. That was right. They knew he had their number. Mrs. Basine, too, was looking. She asked:

"I understand you write, Mr. Lindstrum?"

Books all bound and pretty standing in a row with your name in the papers as a young writer of note and invitations to speak at women's clubs—was what

she meant. That was what writing was to people, to jellyfish.

"I try to write," he answered, making the correction softly so that his words purred.

"You should know Aubrey Gilchrist" said Basine. "Do you know his work?"

"I do not," said Lindstrum still purring. "What does he write?"

Basine chuckled inside. His unaccountable aversion for Aubrey was growing.

"Novels," said Basine.

"Oh," said Lindstrum dragging the syllable out and placing a huge granite period after it.

"What writers do you like?" Fanny inquired with a successful attempt at social artlessness. She was looking for something in this friend of Doris'. She was in awe of him because he was dirty looking and because he swayed as he sat in his chair. He kept swaying as if he were on secret springs and would jump up any minute. He frightened Fanny.

"I read good books," said Lindstrum, "books written by men."

Mrs. Gilchrist sat up stiffly. Her husband peered out of his glasses. He liked Lindstrum. He wanted to talk to him. But he got no further than clearing his throat several times. The judge interrupted with a glower. He was given the floor, eyes turning to him. A defender. But he merely glowered. That was his decision, that settled it. If he glowered this moujik was done for. He glowered Lindstrum off the face of the earth. But Lindstrum turned full on him and thrust his face forward as if he were going to come closer.

"What kind of books do you read?" he asked the glowerer. The snap in his voice startled Henrietta. She was afraid for a minute this strange looking creature waiting for Doris would do something and she turned appealingly to Basine.

"All kinds, sir," the judge answered in his most effective baritone. Lindstrum nodded his head slowly and a grin came into his eyes. He kept looking at the judge and grinning and nodding his head and just as the judge was going to say something Lindstrum abandoned him. He had turned to Aubrey. Aubrey had grown eager. A confusion inspired by an impulse toward garrulity was in his eyes. He wanted to talk to this Lindstrum and discuss things beyond everybody in the room. Lindstrum thought he was a soda-water clerk. One of those radicals with unbalanced ideas. But he wanted to talk to him. Perhaps they had something in common? Aubrey felt himself growing angry. But it was not an anger of silences. An anger of words. He wanted to talk, to reason with Lindstrum and put himself over with Lindstrum. Lindstrum was like a conscience.

"Hello!" The arrival stood up and looked at Doris. He forgot about calling her names. She was smiling at him like a fresh wind blowing through his heart. The roomful dropped out of sight.

"Do you want to go for a walk?" he asked slowly. "It's nice and cold outside."

She nodded and Lindstrum, with a long, deliberate stare at the company spoke to them.

"Good night," he said. When he had said it he continued to stare as if he were weighing the matter

over carefully and should say something more. The pause grew embarassing but not to him. Without nodding his head he repeated the result of his deliberations.

"Good night," he said in the same voice. That was enough.

He left them sitting in their chairs—a general calmly marching off the field of victory. He left behind a silence. The company was uncomfortable.

Mrs. Gilchrist and the judge stared hard at the doorway through which Lindstrum had passed. They wanted to insult the doorway. Lindstrum's visit had had a curious effect upon Ramsey. He had sat silent and avoided the young man's eyes. But he had felt himself becoming animated as if something were exciting him. When the young man had glanced at him for a moment he had blushed and an odd nervousness had made his thin body tremble. Now that Lindstrum was gone he felt the room had become empty and entirely lacking in interest.

"How do you like him?" Mrs. Basine whispered at his side. She was worried.

"Him? Oh yes, the young man," Ramsey muttered. "He . . . he has nice eyes."

10

In the park Lindstrum sat on a bench with Doris and talked.

"All this," he said, "all this night and trees and things we feel more than we see, are like what you're like. But why should we call that love. Because love means to hold a woman in your arms. I don't care about holding a woman. I want to hold something

else. If you hold something in your arms you haven't got it. It's what you can't get your fingers on that you own most. Because you dream about it. It's what you dream about that you own most."

He spoke disconnectedly. There were pauses during which he allowed the night to punctuate his thoughts.

"Have you written any more things since last time?" Doris asked.

"No. I didn't bring anything with me."

He was silent. Doris wished he would sit closer to her. His silence excited her. She could feel things moving in him. She became nervous. Her dark eyes looked fully at his profile and a pride elated her. Other men didn't stare like that into the night. They had fussy little eyes and fussy little bodies. They fidgeted around. But Lief sat as if he were turned to granite.

There was something ominous about him. The glint of his straight eyes and the leather color of his face were ominous. She felt that he was powerful, more powerful than the spaces he stared into. He could stand up and swing the park around their heads. She wanted to come close to him.

"Lief," she whispered, "why don't you come oftener. I get lonely for you. I hardly talk to anybody else."

He nodded as if agreeing with her and saying silently, "That's right. Don't talk to anybody else." But he said nothing aloud.

She wanted to be the thing he swung around his head. If he would take her up and destroy her it would make her crazy with happiness. She closed her

fingers around his hand and trembled. Her body felt weak. Her arms were as if she no longer directed them. They were being drawn.

"I'm so proud of you. You're so different from all of them, Lief. I can't stand them sometimes. They're terrible."

He nodded his head with a ponderous air of sagacity.

"They make me sick," she went on. "All of them. They're not like people but like something else. Like parts of people."

He nodded his head again. She was all right—this girl. She didn't belong with the pack in the room he had left. She wasn't a little slut . . . one of those lying, filthy ones. But he was afraid of her. He wanted to keep things like they were. If you let down to a woman she started climbing all over you and asking for this and for that. Anyway it was time to walk back now. There was a lot of work in the shop. He got up at six.

They walked out of the park together. The spring night called for endings. The darkness hinted. The day with its houses and noises lingered like an unnatural memory in the shadows. What were people for? The darkness hinted. Doris felt a mist in her blood. So curious, the day. Unreal, empty. Noises that circled, faces that went on forever. People had been moving forever. They kept walking and walking. There was no ending to people. The years passed under their feet like a treadmill and they kept moving on.

Now it was quiet. Beside this man she felt there was no more moving on. Her heart filled with im-

patience. It was hard to breathe. Her arms were heavy, overcrowded. "Oh," she whispered to herself, "I'll die. I'll die."

But they continued to walk. The man's silences, his ominous reserves, his sagacious noddings had excited her. She felt angry with him. He had called for her a half dozen times in the last two months. They had met by accident in a book store. A clerk had introduced them. He called and they went for walks. But he said nothing. Once he had told her she was beautiful. Another time he had mentioned, as if it were a casual thing, that she was the sort of girl to whom he would like to make a gift. But of what, he didn't know. Some gift worthy, he said. She had been frightened of him at first. But gradually as she grew accustomed to his strange manners, his bristling silences, she became impatient, angry.

He stopped.

"I'll go this way," he announced. "Good-night."

He stood looking at her for a long minute and then turning, walked away. She watched him but he didn't look back. She walked to the house alone.

Her thoughts now were clear. He was a man who didn't want her but was looking for something of which she was a part. He never tried to touch her. He never said, "I love you," to her. But he did love. She knew that. He called it by other names and misunderstood himself. And he might go on that way till he died, misunderstanding himself. To be near her thrilled him. She remembered how he became taut, immobile, sitting on the bench. His arms quivered. Yet he never tried to embrace her.

She thought about this as she walked to her home.

Would he ever embrace her? She knew about his silences. She could even feel how he suffered inside because something was urging him that had no direction. It was this life in him that lured her. It stirred her senses.

Nothing before had interested her. Days had passed with no difference in them. Now he made a difference. When she remembered him a pain that was like anger filled her.

She would go to bed and lie in the dark dreaming of him with her eyes open. A languor made it difficult to walk. She smiled to herself. It was pleasant, sweet to think of him. For a moment the image of his face transfixed her. She whispered aloud, "Talk to me. Oh, please . . . please . . ."

Then images that disgusted her crowded her thought. They came of their own volition. Her sister Fanny kissing men. Her brother George kissing women. Keegan, the judge, Ramsey, Aubrey and Henrietta—they disgusted her with their continual love-making, kissing, dirtiness. People like that didn't understand anything else. Their bodies searched each other out and clung to each other. Bodies clenched together—she began to rage in silence against them. He called them the pack. They were like that—a pack of animals with nothing else but animal bodies to live with. She paused in her hating, a chill coming between her silent words. The company of images in her mind had dissolved. Their faces came together and blurred into a single face and she saw Lief Lindstrum holding her wildly against him, his lips open and hot against her mouth. . .

The company had gone. Her family was left in the

library. She had intended going upstairs without speaking. But she came into the room and sat down. Fanny looked at her with a questioning innocence that said, "Dear me, I wonder what people do who walk in the park at night?" Her brother was talking. He looked at her with a smile and went on.

"You mustn't think I'm a blockhead, mother, about these people here tonight, for instance. Just because I get along with them. I'll give you my theory of people. We were discussing our guests," he explained turning to Doris. She nodded. "Never believe them," he grinned. "They're all liars. The thing to do is to lie better than they. Honesty, purity, nobility—bah! I know what I'm talking about. That's what people tell each other they are. And they are, of course. Till they're found out. You said a little while ago I was lying. Of course I was. But not the way you mean. That breach of promise case really happened. I wasn't lying about that. You wait, you'll understand what I mean after a few years. I'm going to do things."

He stood up and yawned. Mrs. Basine smiled happily at him. The day had tired her. She felt pleasantly responsible for her three children. Three human beings that belonged to her. At least she could pretend they did. And sometimes it was almost as nice dreaming of what they had in their minds as planning her own tomorrows. Basine went to his bedroom.

He undressed and lay down. Sounds continued in the house. Doris coming upstairs. Fanny chattering to his mother. Water running in the bathroom. He

turned the gas out and lay with his face toward the window.

His body was weary. But he felt young. He thought of the many years ahead of him. Everything was new. Even the century had just begun. A new century. Life was a gay unknown. He thought about things. Things filled the future. They could not be seen or understood but their presence could be felt. Unlived years stretched ahead, like a track without end.

He must be careful not to grow too serious. Lying was easy but he must avoid getting tangled up. Say anything you want to, but look out how hard you say it. People were easy. It would all come out beautifully. Success, power, fame, money, happiness —they were all easy. They would all come to him. People were fools and you could get ahead of them. He yawned. He almost fell asleep. His mind mumbled with words. His day dreams, his memories, his weariness jumbled dim pictures. Phantoms drifted without outline over his head.

He fell asleep and dreamed he was in a brightly lighted hall. Men were cheering. Music played and people were yelling his name. In the dream he was going to make a speech. The brightly lighted hall grew larger and the crowd reached as far as he could see. But he didn't come out to make the speech. Instead a woman in a gaudy dress came out. Her face was white with powder and heavily painted. Her eyes were sunken. In the dream he shuddered because the great crowd would rave indignantly at the substitute who had come out to make the speech for him. But instead, a tremendous cheer went up at the

sight of this woman and everybody yelled, "Basine . . . Basine . . . There he is. Hooray for Basine!" They mistook the woman for him. The woman began to make his speech. The one he had prepared. She spoke in a tired, hollow voice but the crowd continued to cheer. Where was he in the dream? There was no Basine in the dream. He kept wondering about this. There was no Basine but the crowd thought this woman in the gaudy dress with the painted face was Basine and they cheered her for him, calling her, "Basine . . ." while he, hiding somewhere, the dream didn't say where, listened to the woman and the cheers and the shouts of his name. He was saying to himself with a feeling of horror, "I know that woman they think is me. It's that woman Keegan and I met once. Keegan and I met her, by God!" He was going to stop something but the dream went away.

11

The city grows and keeps on growing. People vanish. Buildings spring up to take their places. The streets become full of vast, intricate activities. People have vanished but these activities keep on growing.

The city shakes with noises. A cloud of noises rises from the street and bursts slowly into names. Everywhere one turns, doors and windows chatter with names. Names run up and down the faces of buildings. Gilt names slant downward, porcelain names curve like lopsided grins. Names fly from banners, hang from long wires, lean down from rooftops.

The city is plastered with names. Tired men stop and blink. They mutter to themselves in the street, "Lets see, where am I?" Their eyes stare at an in-

animate dance of names. Names fall out of the sky. An alphabet face with eyebrows, nose, lips and hair made of names winks and sticks out its tongue.

These are not the names of people but of activities. As the city grows the names pile up and reach higher. Names of things to eat, wear, see, feel, smell, dream of and die for—they become too many to see and far too many to read. They drift up and down the faces of the buildings and scamper over the pavements like a lunatic writing.

The vanished people no longer look at them. But the names continue to pile up and spread out. They are a city apart. They no longer offer clews to people. They are no longer advertisements yelping vividly out of the air, but a decoration. Inscrutable hieroglyphs that salute each other in the grave confusion of windows. They grimace with secret meanings at each other and keep each other company in the night sky. Like the people they too have become too many. As the city grows their meanings and purposes also vanish, leaving behind a comet's tail and a deaf and dumb good-bye.

The city grows and devours itself and ceases to become articulate in names. It shakes and howls senselessly. No one understands where the noises come from or why. Windows become too many to count. Activities double on themselves and tangle themselves up in other activities until each activity becomes a mystery to itself. Business men buried in business pause to blink at their desks and mutter, "Let's see, where am I?"

Underneath the activities and the comet's tail of names, the vanished ones crawl about their business of

destinations. They have remained sedately unaware of their disappearance. They have barricaded themselves behind activities and for the most part they are silent. Their activities talk for them in a language easy to hear but difficult to understand. Furnaces, engines, factories, traffic—these talk. Their talk is very important. It is curious that for the simple business of keeping alive there should be so many activities necessary. It is also incomprehensible.

Among themselves people offer each other informations and interpretations. But these informations and interpretations are not of their souls but of their activities which have nothing to do with them except to hide them. They talk of business enterprise, of success, progress, civic development, industrial achievement, political ideals; of money made and money spent. This talk sounds very important. It becomes an important part of the confusion of activities.

Faces uncoiling in the streets, legs slanting against dark walls, suits of clothes—these are the vanished people. Masses of rich and poor moving on, everlastingly moving on through the whirl of years. Age like a tenacious pestilence shovels them off a treadmill. Yet they remain and increase and become hidden from each other by their too many selves, hidden from themselves by their too many activities. They grow confused and stop staring at each other. They walk listening to the shake of the city, blinking at the alphabet face above them.

The city is a great bubble they have blown. It floats over their heads and grows greater and more dazzling. Slowly it sinks down and engulfs them.

This bubble talks for them. Activities talk for

them. It is easier that way. Activities say, "We, the people." This suffices. The vanished ones point with relief to the glitter of activities and repeat, "There are we."

But activities grow too fast and too intricate to understand. The burst of names becomes too violent to grasp. Then the people lost in their bubble become an insupportable mystery to themselves.

Buried beneath activities that grow by themselves, that seem to pulse with mathematical passions and to multiply like a devouring fungus, the vanished ones send up a clamor for whys and wherefores. An official clamor. Life has become an enigma deeper than death. The cry is no longer "Who is God? And where does He live?" But, "Who are We and what are We?"

Surveying themselves they see nothing and demand explanations of this phenomenon. Baffled by their annonymity they demand identifications. They want to be assured that things are all right, that their burial is O. K.

And thus new explainers and identifiers leap daily into existence. These are the bombinators, the dexterous geniuses able to translate the insupportable mystery of life. Life is a mumble mumble, a pointless delirium. People feel this and grow very serious. They feel life is a little breath, a whimsical zephyr capering for a moment through space.

But these are insupportable feelings. It is easy for the fish in the sea to feel like that but in people there is a mania for direction. Out of this mania is born the necessity of illusion—the illusion of direction. There must be illusion. Life is not a mumble mumble but a clear voice teeming with precisions. Not a point-

less delirium but a vast, orderly activity that has names—too many names to count.

As children demand lights in the darkness, grown older they demand illusions in life. Their reasoning is simple. "We are so puny," they think. "There is hardly anything to us. We dare not dream or even think. Look what would happen if we allowed ourselves to dream. We would begin asking impossible questions of ourselves. Why are we? What lies under our senses? So we must put away dreams and thought. They're dangerous. But without them we become insufficient to ourselves. We become incomplete. So make us a part of something outside ourselves that we may remain unaware of our insufficiency. Make us a part of laws and ideas, Gods, systems and activities. We are frightened by what we do not know. And above the highest names on our buildings is a circle of unknowns. Dispel this circle so that we may be rid of our fear. Give us paths to traverse, goals to struggle toward and make these paths and goals outside ourselves. We dare not adventure inside ourselves because that way is inimical. Inspire us with great outward purposes so that the inward purposelessness of our lives that would devour us in enigmas will be obscured."

The illusion-bringers arise—dexterous craftsmen able to fashion purposes, Gods, ideals. Their work is to create heroic destinations, to invent objectivity. These are the geniuses. They provide the sanities which are the vital solace for terror. They invent masters because masters are necessary since to have a master is to have an objective-servitude. The instinct for servitude is an old, unfailing friend. It rep-

resents the clamor for an outward purpose to conceal the inner purposelessness of the vanished ones. And the geniuses are those in whom the instinct for servitude inspires new visions of lovlier masters. Thus is progress made—by increasing and making more definite the demands of masters.

Once the geniuses found their task simple. Now it grows difficult. Famous masters, famous illusions, famous objectives lose their value. Their capacity for solace dwindles. The illusion of God grows dim. The illusions that bore the names Zeus, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Mohamet are fading. The knees of the race have stiffened with vanity and prayer grows difficult. The great Heavens overladen with their angel choirs and hierarchies tumble about the ears of people. Slowly the reservoirs of faith in consoling myths dry up. Epigrams have almost sponged away one of the immemorial deeps of the soul.

The geniuses cast about inventing new masters, masters who will reward and punish and establish paths to traverse and goals to achieve. As the activities increase and as people vanish deeper under the self-growing fungus of finance, industry, government, they develop a paradoxical vanity. A vanity by which they seek to preserve themselves. A vanity becomes necessary that will save them from the knowledge of their inferiority to life. Their age-old illusion of Gods on High drifts away. The new illusion slowly unfolds. Again the reasoning is simple.

The race speaks . . . "There is no longer a God or a Heaven of futures. The words eternity and infinity are bottomless and no longer hold us or guide us. But we must have a master, one who will enable

us to dream of His recompense since we still dare not adventure in dreams of our own. And this master must assure us as our old master did—that there are great purposes in life, great rewards. We will make a minor change in our theology. Once it was our desire to think of ourselves as having been created in the image of God—a Superior. This was when we were strong, when we walked the earth and wore our destinies like gay feathers in our caps. Now we have grown diffused and weak. The world is no longer simple enough for us to understand and ignore. We dare not ignore our disappearance from life. Therefore in order to compensate for this disappearance we will create a God in our image and worship Him. The deeper we sink, the further we vanish, the higher, nobler and more powerful will we make our new God. Come, illusion mongers, we desire a new God. We desire a new Heaven. Make us a Heaven of quicksilver in which we may see not Jehovah who is a myth but our own image glorified, which is closer to reality, and which our dawning intelligence may more easily swallow. In this heaven let us see our civic virtues magnified. We want for a master an idealization of ourselves, whom we may serve in hope of rewards."

Thus the vanished ones stare aloft and slowly the heavenly mirror spreads itself for them—a mirror of identifications and explanations. It is all clear—or at least it grows clear—in this mirror; who we are and what we are. . . . A beautiful image marches arcoss its face. It is the image of the vanished ones, ennobled and deified—become a new illusion, become a God-like creature with flashing eyes. A marvelous, unsurpassable creature whose every gesture is perfection,

whose every grimace is unsurpassable perfection. A reassuring God. Whatever their moods, their despairs, their manias—they have only to look up and see them ennobled and deified in the mirror-heaven.

Gazing aloft the vanished ones raise their voices in a cheer of triumph.

"We are confused. We have disappeared. Our activities have devoured us. But we are not afraid. For behold, whatever we do, we remain God. See our reflection. We are always and consistently perfect. Our stupidities, hysterias, bewilderments shine back at us out of this new Heaven as God-like attributes. Wisdom and victory smile at us eternally out of our mirror. Let the city devour itself and become a jungle of names. Let life lose itself in the labyrinth of activities. Let the buildings devour life until it becomes less than a tiny warmth under huge ribs of steel. These things are no longer insupportable. There is an answer always to "Who are we and what are we?" We are God. By worshipping ourselves we may now dispel the dawning knowledge of our insufficiency. The old God is dead. He was an illusion. The new God alone now has the power to punish and reward. We will kneel with fanatical servitude before the image of our virtues and punish ourselves with a terrible justice in order to appear God-like in our own eyes."

Slowly the new heaven above the city grows and the vanished ones with the eyes of Narcissus stare enchanted into its quicksilver depths.

12

In the days that followed her walk with Lindstrum in the park, Doris Basine abandoned herself to her passion for the man. Her body desired him. She

dreamed of their coming together as of some transcendental climax.

But the months passed and Lindstrum held himself aloof. She felt certain of herself though. It was only necessary to wait. She could go on dreaming of him and waiting too. To think of him, to remember he was alive, this for the time was happiness enough.

After a number of months they saw each other oftener. He seemed to grow more dependent on the fanatical admiration of her eyes and words. Her flattery stirred an excitement in him that he was learning to utilize in writing. The fact that he was loved made it easier to write. The memory of the things she said, of the desire in her eyes was like music. It was easier to write with music playing in his head. But the more he wrote and dreamed of writing the less he desired her. So her passion became an applause urging him from her.

He would listen trembling to her gradually shameless avowals.

"You're so wonderful. So remarkable. You're the only man in the world that's alive. Your genius is something I can't even talk about. It must be worshipped. I love you."

In the midst of such monologues she would suddenly vanish from Lindstrum's thought. Her beauty and desire were powerless to hold his attention. Her enfevered praise would become a lash that drove him into himself. And, trembling with a passion that her love had aroused, he would leave her. But it would be a passion which demanded possession not of her but of himself.

He would walk excitedly to his room over his father's shop and sit down to write.

After many months Doris began to understand. He brought her poems he had written; poems like night music and passion music. She felt his heart throbbing among their words. Even his body was in them. What she wanted of him he gave to the poems he wrote.

She announced herself at home as tired of her surroundings and dependence. Through the aid of a friend she secured a job as clerk in a large bookstore. One evening she came home to tell her mother she was going to move.

Basine entered the argument that followed. To her surprise he took her side, agreeing with her that a modern young woman had a better chance of realizing herself if she lived alone and made her own way.

Mrs. Basine refused to be convinced. Not about the theories, she explained, but about Doris. When her two children argued with her she felt herself the victim of a conspiracy. Why did Doris want to leave her home? And why did George want her to? The answers didn't lie in the arguments they gave. But because she was unable to determine what the answers were, she assented. Later she thought,

"If I hadn't given my consent she would have done it anyway. This way I've saved her from being disobedient."

Doris took up her life in a two-room apartment on the near north side of the city. The district was alive with rooming-houses, little stores, lovers who walked hand in hand at night, artists who tried to paint, writers who worked as clerks and tried to write, workingmen, artisans, derelicts. Everyone seemed alone

in this district and on warm evenings groups of strangers sat stiffly on the stone steps of the houses and stared at the sky.

Doris was able to live on her salary. She made friends and her evenings were devoted to conversations. But they were a curious type of friends. They were men and women one got to know only by their ideas. One became acquainted with their ideas, then familiar with them, then on terms of intimacy with them.

It had been different at home. At home she knew men and women as they were. They sat around and talked and if you listened to what they said you came close to them. You understood them and when they said good-night you knew where they were going. You knew all about them, where they worked, their family, their homes. They grew into familiars as uninteresting and unmysterious as your own relatives.

But here where Doris had come to live were men and women about whom you never learned anything. They talked and talked but all the while you wondered where they worked, what things were in their hearts. You wondered how they lived and what they did all the time. But you never found out. Such informations were not a part of the talk that went on. It was all talk about outside things, about politics and women and art. Everybody in the circle Doris entered became familiar in a short time. But after they had become familiar there remained this mystery about them. What sort of people were they under their poses and behind their words?

The most curious change her freedom brought, Doris was a garrulity that surprised even herself. She became adept in arguments vindicating the emancipa-

tion of her sex and proving that the ideals and standards by which women lived were the rose-covered chains forged for their enslavement by man.

But her garrulity did not deceive Doris. She grew more clearly aware of herself. She knew that her entire upheaval, her taking up new ideas, her repudiating conventions had been inspired by a single factor. She wanted to live alone in a room so there would be no difficulty in giving herself to Lindstrum when the opportunity came.

With this in mind she had deliberately converted herself into a "new woman," since an expression of the new womanhood was independence of family and since independence of family meant a room to herself. Of this subterfuge Doris became tolerantly aware. Her hypocricies did not concern her. In her desire for the man she loved the surfaces of her life disappeared like straws in flame.

Lindstrum had visited her in her new quarters with misgivings. When he was alone he often sat thinking of her and repeating her ardent phrases. This helped him to make love to himself, to seduce the strange companion who lived in the depths of his soul into embracing him. Out of this embrace came words. Out of the ecstacy these hypnotisms induced, he was able to create gigantic phrases, mystic sequences of words whose reading often inspired people with an excitement similar to the emotion that had produced them. Women in particular grew emotional at the contact of his written words. When he read his poetry to some of them who were his friends they closed their eyes and thought he was making love to them.

Lindstrum utilizing the adoration Doris gave him

as a means of self-seduction, remained aware of the danger this offered. The danger was summed up in the word "marriage." At twenty-six his sexual impulses found sublimated outlet in the orgies of self-seduction which he called his creative work. Thus his physical nature clamored for no other mate than his own genius, and the lure of marriage as a legalized debauch failed to touch him. His egoism likewise found a more perfect surfeit in his own self-admiration than in that of others. He saw in marriage merely a forfeit of his privacy and an intruder upon his self-love.

Doris studying him carefully from behind her abandonment discovered the barrier.

"I don't want ever to marry," she explained to him. This started talk in which Lindstrum defended marriage as an institution. He grew eloquent on the subject that society and civilization were dependent upon marriage and that a man who sought to dispense with it was merely being unfaithful to himself as a member of society.

Doris saw through the angry phrases of her friend that he was trying to tell her how little he desired her. He was defending marriage and proclaiming his belief in it, in order to excuse his physical indifference toward her, both in his own eyes and hers. Since she had said she thought marriage was an abomination, he could safely defend it without compromising himself. He need have no fear that she would agree with him. In this way his pose as a moralist was a convenient method of concealing the fact that he had no impulse toward immorality. He could even insist with impunity that she marry him and so use

her rhetorical stand against marriage in general as a personal refusal.

Doris allowed matters to drift through the year. One winter night Lindstrum, invited innocently to occupy the sofa in the studio rather than to tackle the storm-bound transportation outside, consented. He sat reading things he had written until midnight came.

He did not see how it had happened but when he looked up after one of his readings Doris was sitting before the small grate fire. Her face was turned from him and he stared at her. She had undressed and slipped a green silk robe over her body. Her black silk stockings gleamed like exclamation points in the firelight. Her throat and breasts were visible and the shadows mirrored themselves in her white arms.

As he looked at her the warmth of the room seemed to bring her closer. He thought her beautiful and standing up went to her side. His hand sought clumsily to caress the hair coiled on her head. He stood silent, remembering how she loved him. Always the thought excited him. But now he seemed to be thinking about it with a curious calm. There was something about a woman who loved that was beyond words to figure out.

She looked up at him with a smile. A faint odor stirred from her. He found himself drawing deep breaths and staring at her with a heavy pain in his arms. The pain she had always brought to him and out of which he had made his words. Now this was easier, simpler—to reach his arms around her . . .

. . . "I belong to you now," she whispered as the dawn lighted the room. The fire in the grate still

burned feebly. They had kept it alive during the night.

"You see," she went on, "I was right about not marrying. We can love each other like this without marrying ever. Oh I love you so. You make me so happy.

"Yes," he murmured sleepily, intent upon the whitening room. "Dawn—the white shadow of night," whispered itself through his mind. But he said nothing. After an interval he repeated as if delivering himself of innumerable ideas—"Yes."

. . . Lindstrum slowly extricated himself from the lure of her passion. For months her love, dissolving rapturously in his embrace, remained a flattery too bewildering to resist. He allowed himself then to yield to the slowly accumulating demands of his mistress. Nevertheless in a month he had lost interest in his own sensations. The thought of impending embraces in the studio failed to arouse him . . . There was nothing Doris had to give that was comparable to the delicious elation his own self-seduction held for him.

But although the physiology of sex lost its attraction for him, he remained interested in Doris' submission. Her delight in his caresses and her exclamations of arduous love fascinated him as a species of applause. He grew able to resist the contagion of her sensualism and to make her happy, without essentially occupying himself.

In the second year of their association he gradually undermined her passion. Aware of his complete coolness, Doris fought successfully to suppress the

ecstacies he was able to stir in her. Their relations by degrees returned to a platonic basis.

Lindstrum was becoming known. His poetry printed in fugitive labor gazettes was attracting a slight attention. He was being identified as a poet of the masses. The masses, however, unable to understand, let alone appreciate the mystic imagery and elusive passion of his vers libre phrasings remained oblivious to him. They continued to read and swear by the newspaper jinglers celebrating in rhyme the platitudes which kept them in subjugation. His fame was beginning through the enthusiasm of a few scattered dilletantes who abhorred the masses and saw in his work an intense technique and high asthetic quality.

He remained loyal to Doris in one respect, still coming to her for the adulation which somehow quickened his desire to write. But Doris, with the repression of her own desires had grown silent. She appeared to relapse into her former self—the enigmatic and disdainful virgin of the Basine library.

But this simulation included only her mannerisms. As a girl of twenty she had been without thought. Now a strange intellectualism preoccupied her. It developed when she was twenty-three and when Lindstrum was beginning to ignore her again. It began with the knowledge that there were definite preoccupations luring her lover from her. Against one of these she knew herself powerless. This was his desire to write. She had understood this thing in Lindstrum from the first. It had been, in fact, the lure of the man. But now it had taken entire possession of him and had become her rival.

He had grown dumb. His grey eyes no longer

smiled or roved. They gazed without movement as if fixed on invisible objects. They seemed without sight, yet there was life in them—an intensity like the anger of blindness. He no longer looked at things. He avoided contact with the visible and imposed a deliberate fog on his vision. He went through his day unaware of details, yet absorbing them; unseeing, yet translating the commonplaces around him into phenomena that tugged at the hearts of his few readers.

Doris knew the futility of combating in her lover the habit of self-seduction now became a vital necessity. She tried to establish a harmony between them by turning to writing herself. The clarity of her mind made poetry impossible. Her thoughts refused to dissolve into magnificent blurs. Her emotions were too definite to find solacing outline in ambiguous pirouettes.

She envied her lover his natural aptitude for poetry. It seemed to her a comforting and satisfying evasion —to write poetry. There were no rules of logic, coherence, technique. There was even no rule of intelligibility.

There was a man named Levine with whom she discussed matters of this sort, exchanging definitions with him of such things as life, love and art. He was a Jew and worked on a newspaper. Lean, vicious-tongued and unkempt, the fantastic skepticism of this man attracted her. He was a man without principles, ideas, prejudices. His attitude toward life she sensed to be a pose. But he had been completely consumed by this pose and the pose was one of superiority. His brain was like a magician. It waved words over ideas or problems and they turned inside out. Or they

vanished and reappeared again as their opposites. He appeared to devote himself with a mysterious enthusiasm to proving everyone but himself in the wrong. When he read editorials in the newspapers he would comment, "They say this. But they mean this." And he grew elated explaining the low, sordid motives which inspired the noble-phrased pronouncements in the press and elsewhere.

When she talked to him about poetry one evening he knew her well enough to understand she wanted to talk about Lindstrum. Doris had tried her hand at poetry and the results had been in a measure satisfactory. Poems had come out under her pencil. She compared them coldly with things Lief had written. They were as good and better. She offered them to Levine to read. He nodded after each one and smiled, "Very nice. Excellent. Superb." Then he handed them back to her and added, "I've always known this. Anybody can write poetry. This poetry is quite good. But it remains, you're no poet."

And he recited from memory a few lines of Lindstrum's work.

"You see the difference," he said. "His rings truer. Although yours is much more lucid and beautifully written. The difference isn't between your work and his but between your work and yourself and his work and himself. When Lindstrum wrote that he felt a thrill of satisfaction. He had for a minute completed himself in the poem. Therefore the thing represented a certain perfection. When you wrote you felt nothing after writing it. In an hour the whole thing seemed rather senseless and unworthy of you. You felt no thrill of completion. This shows that no matter if you

write a dozen times better than Lindstrum the fact remains that you're not a poet and he is.

"But why write poetry. I have a friend who says that poetry is an impish attempt to paint the color of the wind. He hasn't written any himself yet but he will. But I've warned him. He'll never succeed. Lindstrum will because Lindstrum has the faculty of rising above logic. He can recreate his emotions in words. Emotion is unintelligent, banal, wordless. The trick of being a great poet is to make your mind subservient to your emotion—the triumph of matter over mind, in other words."

He noticed an inattentiveness and stopped. He hoped some day to make love to her but as long as she remained interested in his verbal jugglings he was content with that.

When she was alone Doris took a morbid interest in unravelling ideas and attenuations of ideas. Morbid, because the process seemed to bring a melancholy to her. But she persisted. There was an elation. Thinking was like a game in which one surprised oneself with denouements.

One day while walking she reasoned silently about her situation. Her love for Lindstrum had grown. At times it fell on her like a despair. She would lie in the dark of her room repeating to herself that she would go mad unless he came back to her, unless he loved her.

Walking swiftly she began to think of her plans. Her plans centered upon bringing him back to her arms.

"If I'm going to do this I must first of all be clear about myself," she thought. "I've become interested

in lots of things. I must find out why and what's started me."

The answer that came to her was one of the denouements of the game. It repeated, but clearly, that she was chiefly concerned with bringing Lief back to her and that one way to do this was to become keener than he, become brilliant enough to deflate him, to confuse him. And this could best be done by attacking his subject matter, by turning his conceptions of life and people upside down and so throwing him out of gear.

When she got home she was still thinking.

"What I must do, is make him think. He doesn't think. The pictures he sees pass like blurs through his eyes and come out like blurs under his pencil. If I can make him think he'll have to open his eyes. He'll have to defend what he accepts without defenses now —the nobility of the masses, the beauty of life. And if he starts thinking and doubting he won't be able to write because he's not built to write that way. He's built to write out of passion."

The idea became cruelly apparent in her mind. She must destroy Lindstrum in order to possess him. She must beat down the passionate certitude of the man, puncture his blind, roaring egomania, take away from him his genius and then he would turn to her.

Her thought at this point gave itself over to the passion in her. Anger filled her and a strange viciousness as though she had something under her hands to tear to pieces. Her clear-thinking mind was a weapon —a thing she could use to destroy a rival with. And if it destroyed Lief along with the rival, what matter? Slowly the morbidity of her position grew. Levine

was an ally. His talk gave her ideas—directions in which to think. She disliked his attitude. The man was an insincerity. There was also something unctuous and cowardly about him. He never stood up for his notions in the face of conservatively indignant people. He capitulated and even denied his beliefs or lack of beliefs. Yet in the nihilism to which he pretended she found a background for her own thinking. Nihilism to Levine was a conversational pastime. To Doris it became a despairing hope for salvation. She poured over books, carefully questioned the secrets of life, not like a philosopher seeking answers but like a Messalina questing for poisons.

Her debates with Lindstrum were at first casual and goodnatured. A humility before his genius made her unable to assert herself. He could hurl his mystic word sequences at her and their beauty made her incapable of appreciating their lack of psychologic content.

But her determination grew. She must destroy—what? The somber ecstasy which the spectacle of people awoke in him. People . . . people . . . the word contained the shape and soul of her rival. People . . . workers, toilers, underdogs . . . he sang of their bruised hearts and their little gropings. Songs of unfulfilled dreams, of moods like ashen baskets that broke under the weight of life. Coal miners, farmers, stevedores, vagrants, desperadoes, drowsy clerks and fumbling factory hands—the dull faces of the immemorial crowd sweating for its living, grunting under its burdens—his phrases hymned their loneliness and their defeats. Beautiful phrases that seemed almost the work of a fantastic word weaver.

But she knew better. The little images, the patterns of street scenes, the aloof fragments of idea—these might be to some only decorations. The curve of a pick going through the air, the shake of a great trestle with an overland train thundering across, the glint of a night torch under the eyes of a section gang—these might be only abstractions outlining bits of rhythm and color. But then Lindstrum would not have been a poet.

There was beneath them, buoying them higher and higher like some mysterious, invisible force, a passion. It escaped now and then from between the lines of his work, shaking itself like a fist, holding its arms out like a lost woman. Threats crept out of the placid little images in which fragments of street scenes postured vividly for the eye. A fury loomed suddenly behind the mumble of a hurdy-gurdy piece; a snarl offered itself as invisible punctuation for a fol de rol of city life.

It was a passion that identified itself with, and seemed to fatten upon, the injustices of life. It sought to champion the war of the crowd against man and nature.

"The humble ones . . . the humble ones . . . " it sang, "they are God. The ones life walks upon. The working ones, the cheated ones—here is their song. The oppressed ones, listen to their hearts beating."

It was a passion out of which a great propagandist might have been born. But Lindstrum's mind was too simple to utilize it, even to understand it. He was aware only of a torment that seemed to twist at his heart and bring words like soothing whispers into

his thought. A craftsman obsession moulded it slightly. But always the inarticulate excitements that had started him writing remained fugitive among his written words saying neither "I hate," nor "I love," but affirming with a monotonous crescendo, "I am. I am!"

Doris caught by the fanatic lyricism of his songs yielded her intellect to them for a time. The shoemaker Wotans and hobo Christs startled her into an acquiesence. But she was determined. She knew that her praise of his poetry was like an admiration of his infidelity. Yes, he loved people as he might have loved her, blindly with his heart, with his arms around their bodies and his grey eyes looking hungrily through them.

The debates grew less casual. There were abrupt climaxes during which he stared at her with anger. Then it was no longer a debate of ideas but of wills. Here she knew herself powerless and yielded at once, making use of her apology to caress his face or seize his hand.

Alone again she would study the things she had said as she studied from day to day the social, political and spiritual history of her own and other times. Her mind grew to master the phrases which outlined the illusions of the crowd, which revealed the lusts and errors of the crowd. Her thought inspired by the single desire to destroy for her lover the beauty of her rival, rallied continually from its defeats before his anger. Her cynicism became a mystic thing—her adoration of her lover turning into a hatred of life, a contempt of people.

At night she sat in the window of her room overlooking the thinly crowded street. The obsession held

her now, occupying her energies entirely. In its excitement, in the mental twistings, she found rest from the desires that burned.

Alone . . . she was alone. She would play langorously with this sense of loneliness. She would repeat quietly, "He'll never come to me again. Never hold me in his arms. How beautiful he is. His lips are not like any man's lips could be. But he doesn't love me any more. He loves this in the street below. Men and women in the street."

And here her thinking would begin, a sequel to the preface of sorrow. Below her moved the face of her rival—the crowd. She must study the thing out carefully so as to be clear in her words when she talked to him. So as to make her words a poison in him that would destroy the passion for her rival.

The night lifted itself far away. Little lights ran a line of yellow at the foot of buildings. Men and women. What were men and women? The blur of faces in the street, moving along every night, what was that? Something to idealize and give one's soul to? No.

Individuals racing toward their secret destinations and tumbling with a sigh into an inexhaustible supply of graves—that was a phenomenon to be studied separately. Out of that one could locate plots, dramas, humor, tragedy. But here below the window was another story—was a great character that had no name but that her lover worshipped. The crowd . . . this thing in the street he sang of as the crowd was a single creature. Its face was one, its voice one. It had one soul—the soul of man. A dark thing, alive with inscrutable desires.

"They're not people," she whispered, her eyes staring down, "but traditions walking the street. Accumulations of desires and impulses taking the night air."

She watched it move in silence, buried beneath names and buildings.

The crowd . . . It was blind to itself. Its many eyes peered bewilderedly about. Its many legs moved in a thousand directions. And yet it was identical. Faces, different shaped bodies, different colored suits —these were part of a mask. Sentences that drifted in the night, laughters, sighs—these were part of a mask. Under the clothes, faces, names, talk of people, was a real one—the crowd. It had no brain.

And yet this creature that moved in the street below, in all streets everywhere, made laws, made wars, and mumbled eternally the dark secrets of its soul. The crowd . . . a monstrous idiot that devoured men, reason and beauty. Now it moved with a purr through the street. It was going somewhere, making love, making plans, diverting itself with little hopes. Its passions and its secrets slept. It moved like a great somnambulist below her window, with a fatuous complacency in its dead eyes. Its many masks disported themselves in the night air. But let hunger or fear, let one of the inscrutable impulses awake it, and see what happened. Ah! Communes, terrors, rivers of blood, heads on spikes, torture and savagery!

She must tell this all clearly to him, explain lucidly to him how the hero-crowd of his singing was a gruesome and stupid criminal blind to itself and afraid of itself and inventing laws to protect it from itself. How it was a formless thing with hungers and desires

moulded in the beginning of Time. How it demanded proofs of itself that the darkness of its brain and the savagery of its heart were the twin Gods from whom all wisdom and justice flowed. How the workers, the defeated ones, the under dogs he sang of and loved were like the others—lesser masks envying superior masks. And how the idealisms, Gods and hopes they all worshipped were lies the beast whispered to itself, fairy tales by which the beast consoled itself. Yes, a monster that devoured men who threatened its consolations, a wild fanged beast purring eternally in the path of progress. Reason was a little cap the masks wore that every wind blew off. Her loneliness faded. Seated by her window Doris no longer desired the lips of her lover. There was another elation . . . a knowledge of the thing in the street, a certainty that she could make Lief Lindstrum understand.

One evening when he had returned to her after an absence of a month she decided to talk calmly to him of the things she had been thinking. He came in with an air of caution, that frightened her for an instant. She studied him as he took off his coat and hat and sat down. It was autumn outside. Dark winds seemed to have followed him in. This was an old trick of his that had once thrilled her. He seemed always to have come from faraway places, to have risen out of depths with secrets in his eyes. Her heart yielded as she watched him. There was the quality about him she could never resist, the thing her senses clamored for. Not that he wrote poetry—but that he was a poet.

It was almost useless to argue with him, to destroy him. No matter what he said or what he was doing

she could see him always as he really was—a silent figure walking blindly over men and buildings, over days and nights; walking with its eyes snarling and its mouth tightened; walking over days and nights after a phantom—a silent figure walking after a phantom. The phantom whispered, "Come" . . . and the silent figure nodded its head and followed. That was how she saw him when her heart yielded, when she desired again to throw herself before him, make herself the phantom he was following.

But the obsession in her changed the picture slowly. Not a phantom but a face she knew—the face of the crowd. A wild fanged monster that had cast a spell over her lover and he went walking blindly after it calling words to it, singing lullabys to it, when all these things should have been for her.

Their talk began as she wished it. He was ill at ease. Why had he come? He was afraid to stay away? Why? She wondered questions as he sat uncertainly in the chair and offered vague gossip and information to explain his presence. Then she said abruptly:

"I'm writing a story. I've decided not to do any more poetry but write a story—a book, maybe."

He nodded.

"What about?" he asked.

"People. About people," she smiled. She noticed his body stiffen and his eyes grow hard.

"Yes, about people," he repeated slowly.

He was cautious when he came to see her now. She had reason to make demands of him. She had given herself to him and he didn't trust her. And she was always trying to do something to him. He knew this.

It was hard to understand her lately but one thing was easy—she was not to be trusted.

"How they come together in crowds," she continued evenly, "and lose themselves in a common identity. How they become a hideous, unreasoning savage—a single savage. I'm going to write a book making this savage the . . . the hero."

She paused to look at him. He was inattentive but she knew better.

"You should be interested," she smiled.

"Why should I be interested?" he asked slowly.

"Because you write about people, too."

"Yes."

"Or think you do," she went on. "I'm going to write about people as a crowd—as one savage without a brain. That's the crowd. And this savage is the hero of my story. Without a brain to think he creates out of his savagery the Gods, laws and illusions under which you and I live, Lief. Do you understand that?"

He looked at her without answer. Her heart grew alive with strength. She knew he was incapable of any answer but anger. His anger could usually defeat her but this time she felt she could laugh at him when he began to scowl. She stood up.

"You," she said softly, "are like they are. Like the crowd. You do not think or reason. You only feel. Words are accidents to you . . . crazy hats that rain down on your head. You write out of a hatred for things superior to the beast. You're mad at life because it isn't as beautiful as you'd like it to be. So when you get maddest you begin to sing lies about it."

She laughed at the scowl on his face.

"Yes, I've figured it out, Lief. You're a terrible liar. When you say you love people, the crowd, you're a terrible liar then. You don't love the crowd at all. What is your love of people but a blind infatuation with yourself? You hate them. Whose humanity are you all the time writing about and singing about? Your own. But you're ashamed to admit that. Sometimes people are ashamed to boast of themselves so they boast of something else they've created in their own image—of their Gods. That's the way you boast of your crowd. You're ashamed to boast of yourself so you fix it up for yourself by giving the virtues you think you've got to people and then singing about them as if you were an altruist and a sympathetic human observer. You're a great liar, Lief. And the thing you love is a lie you make up. Because people are foul. And you know it. They're not like you or me. They can't think even as much as a rat thinks. They're as rattle-brained as chickens, as greedy as vultures. And they lie all the time—good God, how they lie. You hate them too. You know all this better than I do. But you keep feeling things and you imagine they're things people feel. You . . ."

She stopped and looked at him with a smile. She had started to insult him and had ended by pleading with him. His jaws were working as if he were chewing. This was his anger. But she felt no defeat, nothing but a slight confusion. She was disappointed in herself because she could not recapture the thoughts that had filled her during the month. They had been clear at their inception but now they were mixed up with desires for Lief, with a fear of him. They were mixed up so that out of what she was saying there

arose no clear image of Lief and his relation to life or of the crowd and its foulness.

"Why don't you answer what I say?" she asked. "Are you afraid to discuss things you are absorbed in? If people are so wonderful lets talk about them."

She felt a triumph. She had destroyed something. She could tell by his eyes. They were becoming wild and unfixed. If she could be certain of destroying it forever, of killing in him the love for her rival . . . then . . .

"The little finger of one intelligent man is worth the whole of the French revolution," she was saying excitedly. "You're no different from the other cowards who devote themselves to flattering the monster. You know what I mean. The monster rewards liars and flatterers. All you have to do to be great in the eyes of the world is to celebrate the glories of the monster. To make a lickspittle of your genius. It's an old and easy formula. Why don't you think? You stand up with your eyes closed and sing about things that never existed—about the beauty of people and . . . and . . ."

Lindstrum thrust his face close to her. She paused. A desire to laugh came as she stared at the too familiar features of the man. This was the face she had held in her hands and covered with kisses. Nights of passion and adoration had been shared with this face. Now it held itself savagely before her and grew blurred. Something had been destroyed in it. It was no longer familiar. It was somebody else's face . . .

"People," it said as if it were going to spit at her. "Yes, like you say. Think about them! God damn . . ."

"Lief," she murmured.

"Don't call me Lief . . ." He glowered closer.

"Oh! Then you're angry. Well, I didn't expect you to agree." She made her voice tender now. She did not want his face unfamiliar like this as if she had never held it in her hands and covered it with kisses.

But he continued to thrust himself unfamiliarly before her.

"Yes, I agree about the crowd," he answered, his eyes swinging over her head, his jaws still working. "I agree. You got 'em right. Down in the mud of themselves. And me with them, do you hear that! Me singing with 'em. Get me, now. I'm going to tell you."

She moved away from this unfamiliar face but it came closer again.

"I don't want any of your brains. Not for mine. I want to be like I am. This beast you talk about . . . That's me. He can't talk or reason . . . All right. He won't then. But he'll do something else. He'll live. He'll go on living. Yes," he raised his voice to a shout, "I agree with you. Because I'm the crowd. Do you get that . . . you dirty . . . you dirty fool . . . you . . ."

The oath brought his passion into his head. His hand clenched and his fist shot into her face. She staggered away from him, calling his name. He watched her fall against a couch. A rage cried in him. He was a liar, was he? And a coward? All right. He was. Look out for all liars and cowards then. He walked toward the couch and stood above her. What did she want of him? She wanted something. Tears filled him. People . . . people that sweated and grunt-

ed and crawled around like beasts and raised their eyes at night to the stars . . . This monster she gabbed about, this thing without hands or eyes. That was it.

She was crying on the couch. All right. Let her. But she was crying because she wanted something . . . His hands grabbed her head and straightened her face until their eyes were looking into each other.

"Listen," he said. He was shaking her. "I'm going away."

Eyes watched each other. She looked until the face she had once kissed became entirely strange. There was no Lief, no lover. But a face staring murderously into hers. But there was something else. Tears behind the stare. Why was he weeping? The question like a tiny visitor sat down in her mind.

He let her go and walked from the room, grabbing his hat and coat into his hands as he went.

Doris listened. Down the stairs. Outside. He was gone. She went to the window. Her eye had swelled and her cheek pained. She sat down and looked into the street.

"He hit me," she was whispering to herself. She began to weep with shame. But her tears seemed to soften her heart toward him. He had cried too. She arose and went to the bed. Here she had lain with him. Warm, familiar hours. Here her arms had held him. She threw herself down and wept aloud.

II.

13.

George Basine was going to see his sister Doris. In the nine years since she had left her mother's home she had become a strange woman to Basine. She had always been strange to him. But now it was as if she were entirely unhuman.

He could talk to her without shame of things that were shameful. But there was something more tangible in her presence than the joy of being able to confess things to her. She was practical in her ideas. She gave him hunches for his speeches sometimes and what she said about people and how to make an impression on them was always of value. She understood such things. How, he couldn't determine. It was probably an instinct with her.

Basine walked along in the spring afternoon. It was Sunday and he should have stayed home. Henrietta had been angry when he left. Sunday was his day for her and the two children. There were two children now—one a boy of seven, and a girl of five.

But he said, "I want to see Doris. She's been feeling rather off lately. And if you don't believe I'm going there, why just call up in an hour. And keep on calling every hour if you want to keep check on me."

He was always angry with his wife when he left her. She made him feel that he was doing wrong, although she seldom said anything. But to go away and leave her on Sunday was wrong. But not for the reasons she sometimes hinted at.

He knew that she suspected his frequent absences

from the house. He accused her of hounding him with her jealousy, and the knowledge of his innocence—he had never been unfaithful during the eight years of their marriage—made him angry. The elation of righteous anger in which he indulged himself on all occasions involving Henrietta, was a ruse which obscured for both himself and his wife the actual reasons of his absences. She bored him to a point of fury. His children and their endless noises and questionings set his nerves on edge. He fled in order to escape his home. But Henrietta hinted that he left her for someone else. And he denied this hotly. And in the excitement which accusation and denial aroused both of them managed to avoid facing the fact that he stayed away for no other reason than to escape the boredom of her presence and discomfort of his home.

Basine was careful to avoid this fact. It was incompatable with his ideas. He had become a man of belligerent righteousness. He was slowly emerging as a public figure. As an assistant in the state's attorney's office his political activities were attracting more attention than his legal work. He was in demand as a campaign orator. And the candidates in whose behalf he addressed the public were men, he pointed out with an air of fearlessness, who believed first of all that the home was the cornerstone of civilization.

"He is a man worth while," he would declaim, "a capable administrator. But first of all our candidate is like you and me. His heart is centered in his home. The greatest rewards life holds for him are not the offices we are able to bestow on him but the love of his wife and children."

Since his marriage which from the first had irritated

him and then set his teeth on edge, he had devoted himself seemingly to a public idealization of his own predicament.

Nine years had brought changes in Basine. He had grown leaner. His face had sharpened into hawk lines. There was about him at thirty-four, an aristocratic pugnaciousness. Fearlessness was a word which was gradually attaching itself to his name. He was fearless, people said. His lean body and unphysical air contributed to their decision.

When he appeared publicly people saw a wiry-bodied man past thirty with an amazing determination about him. His words snapped out, his eyes flashed as he talked. And his talk was usually alive with denunciations. He denounced enemies of the people and ideas that were enemies.

During the minor campaigns for aldermen, state's attorney and the judiciary elections in which he had been employed by his party leaders, he had created a slight newspaper stir. The public had quickly sensed in him an interesting character.

And then, although he was years working toward this end, he had suddenly leaped forward as a champion of their rights. He had become one of the select group of indomitable Davids striding fearlessly forth to do battle with the Goliaths that threatened. And there were always Goliaths threatening. Insidious Goliaths; shrewd, merciless Goliaths continually on the verge of opening their terrible maws and devouring the rights of the public.

Basine was coming forward as a champion consecrated to the slaying of Goliaths. Not only during campaigns, which, of course, was the open season for

Goliath-slaying, but between campaigns, behind closed doors where nobody saw, in the bosom of his family. He never removed his armor or rather, never laid aside his holy slingshot. He was always locked in a death struggle with new and unsuspected Goliaths —this wiry, fearless man who was beginning to cry out in the newspapers . . . "The enemies of the public must be overthrown. It matters not who they are or in what camp they are. The city must be cleaned up."

Following the failure of several private banks in the cosmopolitan district of the city, Basine had leaped forward against this new Goliath. This had been his first major offensive.

Private banks were threatening the peace of the public. He had made several speeches before business men's associations denouncing private banks and private bankers. He had declared with utter disregard of personal or political consequences that they were a menace—that they were sharks swimming in the waters of finance—and that he would not rest until the public had been made safe against their predatory, merciless jaws.

He was on this Sunday morning in the midst of the fight against private banks. The excitement had started with the failure of a small banking institution on the west side. The newspapers had carried the usual stories of weeping depositors and heartbroken working people whose life-time savings had been swept away in the crash. Basine had overlooked the stories in the papers. Doris had called them to his attention. He had been sitting in her studio . . . Here was something worth while. Why didn't he start a cam-

paign against private banks. There was always agitation, but as yet not a big campaign.

When he left her the thing had already matured in his mind. He wondered why she had laughed during the discussion of the possibilities of such a campaign. He remembered her saying with a sneer, "That's the sort of thing the crowd eats up. The trouble with you George, is that you haven't learned the trick of frightening the mob. You can't be a leader unless you frighten them first and then leap out to defend them. The menace of private banks is something to frighten them with. Start a crusade."

That was it—a crusade. Movements and reforms were all very well. But they were slow work. In order to advance one had to attach oneself to tidal waves. Doris was right about frightening them.

Within a week he had launched his attack. He had developed a technique in his public utterances which was becoming more and more unconscious and so more and more convincing. Once determined that a crusade against private banks would be a step in his upward climb, his cynicism in the matter vanished. He investigated the subject thoroughly, filling his mind with statistics. Events played into his hands. A second private bank collapsed at the end of the week and Basine knew that the ground was ready for his crusade.

He began not with an attack against the institution of private banks, but shelving the statistics he had carefully mastered, he concentrated upon creating a sense of terror in the public mind. In statements given out to the press and in speeches before business men's associations which were also reported in the newspapers, he pounded on the note of menace. They were

a menace. They were something to be afraid of. They jeapordized stability. They were wildcat institutions.

It was his first crusade and he waited nervously for the response. The response came after a pause of a week like an answering shout. Down with private banks! A conflagration of headlines flared up. The people were against private banks. Editorials heralded the fact. The newspapers were against private banks. A week ago private banks had been the furthest topic from the public conversation. Now it became a matter of violent discussion. Citizens committees were being formed for the purpose of fighting private banks.

Feeling began to run high. Very high. A neighborhood Polish financier who for years had conducted a small banking institution was mobbed on his way to work and rescued from the violence of the crowd, which threatened his life by the arrival of police. This incident was reported by the newspapers as revealing the determination of the men seeking to wipe out the menace of the private bank and also as revealing the unscrupulous power of the men engaged in the private banking business.

The growing clamor against the institution resulted naturally in the collapse of two more small banks whose depositors, terrified by reports they themselves were circulating, rushed to withdraw their savings.

Basine contemplating the extent of the public indignation felt a pride and a misgiving. He glowed with the thought that he, Basine, had started the thing. His name had from the beginning figured prominently in connection with the growing crusade . . . "Basine Denounces Private Banks . . ." had started it. And then a flood of headlines, "Banking Sharks Prey on

poor, says Basine." . . . And then "Basine Flays Private Bankers at Mass Meeting . . ." "Private Bank Menace Growing . . ."

He had kept his head during the publicity and, unaccountably, his thought had turned to his sister as the crusade gathered momentum, as the "menace" grew." Although alive with a powerful indignation against the enemy, Basine remained mentally aloof in contemplating the situation. His aloofness was not a cynicism but a guide.

He studied the fact that the clamor was in the main artificial. The menace of the private bank was a thing that touched less than one per-cent of the population. There were no more than thirty such minor institutions in the city and more than two-thirds of these were as sound as the banks under government supervision. His statistics had revealed this.

Nevertheless in some mysterious way the phrase "private bank" had become synonymous with ogre, villainy, menace, calamity. His original denunciation published rather casually by the press had been a species of newspaper feelers. The public had responded. Realizing then that the subject was a live one the papers had cut loose. The idea of a trusted public institution being a danger and a menace to the community was quick in awaking a sense of alarm. A sense of fear inspired by no facts but by the reiterative rhetoric of the press swept the city.

Basine for several days sought futilely to understand the phenomenon of this fear. It seemed almost as if people were filled with constant though innate fear of the things they trusted. A man named Levine whom he had met at Doris' explained it that way. He had

restrain himself from jumping up to see and sit listening to hear her breathe.

He felt sorry for her. When he had married Henrietta she had been the only one who had understood. He could always remember what she had said at the wedding. It was the only thing he could recall of the event—what Doris had said to him . . .

"You'll never be a great man if you let yourself get trapped like this too often."

Surprising that she should know enough to say that. Because anyone who could say that to him must know him thoroughly and understand him thoroughly. It was what he had been saying to himself for months before the wedding.

He felt sorry for his sister. They were good friends in a way. A curious way because he felt she detested him somehow. Yet she understood him and could help him. And she liked him to come to see her. He wondered why. She had no love for him but there was something about him that appealed to her and interested her. He had noticed how she acted toward others. Their talk left her dead. Even when Levine talked she often remained unaware he was around. Her eyes never opened to people. Even her mother. And Fanny had said, "Doris is getting more and more of a pill. I think she's going crazy. She doesn't even look at a person anymore."

He watched her and thought, "Poor girl. Something wrong. I wish I could help her."

He kept remembering how beautiful and alive she had been and his heart felt an odd laceration as if something he loved were dying. Was he so fond of Doris, then? He said, "no." Yet he could never

remember having felt such sympathy as this toward anyone. It was because she was an intimate. He felt toward her as he felt toward himself—forgiving, appreciative, and a sense of pity. Why had he thought that? Pity. Did he pity himself, he, George Basine, who was just beginning to ascend? Henrietta and the kids—that was it. A man had to accumulate troubles if he was to amount to anything.

The feeling of sympathy slipped from his thought. Doris had turned her eyes to him. Basine was aware of her coming to life. The symmetrical mask of her face became features and expressions.

"Will you stay for tea?" she asked.

He would. Doris stood up and regarded him with a malicious smile.

"The crusade seems to be running away from you," she said.

He nodded. The public-spirited leader in him did not relish the ironic tilt of her words. But he was able to assume a dual attitude toward her cynical intellectualism. He could frown on it with a sense of outrage. And he could listen to it with an appreciative shrewdness. He could despise her iconoclasm and still utilize its intelligence to aid him in his climb.

He had always understood that to his sister his aspirations were contemptible. And yet despite her sneering she seemed anxious to help him realize them. He understood, too, that in his sister's mind there was something queer about people. When she talked about people her eyes lighted. There was about her talk of people a clarity of idea that contrasted strangely with the passion one could feel behind her words.

Basine usually tried to dismiss the impression she made on him by thinking, "Oh, she's a fanatic on the subject, that's all." But a mystery worried him. Why should she be interested in his career? And why should she try to help him if she despised him and his type of ambition? And, moreover, despised people and politics in general?

It was a paradox and it made him uncomfortable. But he sought her out all the more for this. Because there was something practical about her fanaticism. Yes, and because she understood about him.

He had already told her secrets about himself, particularly about himself in relation to Henrietta. That formed a bond between them. He sometimes grew frightened at the thought of the things Doris knew about him—things she might tell to anyone and ruin him; wreck his home and his career. But always after worrying about such fears he would hurry to his sister and unburden himself still further. As if by feeding her further secrets he could make certain of her loyalty and reticence.

He watched her less openly as she poured tea. A bitterness filled him. If Henrietta were only a woman like this instead of a stick. If only he could sit home and talk things over with her, marriage would have some sense to it. He frowned. He did not like to think this way.

Doris began to talk smoothly, her dark eyes growing more alive. He listened nervously, wincing under the contempt of her phrases and fascinated by the startling interpretations they offered him of his own thoughts.

"If I were you," she said as she arranged the tea-

cups, "I would let myself be squeezed out of the crusade. It's served its purpose for you. You've frightened about a million feeble-minded creatures into a fury against private banks. You've done quite well. That's the secret, you know. And you must always remember it. Create bogeymen to frighten people with. The more unreal the bogeymen, the more terrified the public. If you don't believe this figure out for yourself—of what are people the most afraid? God, of course. The greatest of the bogeymen. And remember too, George that people like to be terrified. There's a reason for that. People like to be preoccupied by false terrors in order not to have to face real frightening facts—facts such as death and age and their own souls."

She sat down and looked at Basine with a pitying smile.

"What a fool you are, George. You don't believe a word I say, do you?"

"What you say and how you say it are two different things," he answered. The thought was in his mind that Fanny was right. Doris was going crazy. Her talk had an edge to it as if her voice were being carefully repressed. He almost preferred her when she was silent, when her eyes slept. Because now there was a hidden wildness to her. She was suffering! The thought startled him. But that was it. The hate that filled her voice came from a suffering inside. He wanted to reach over and take her hand and whisper to her to be calm, but he continued to listen without moving. There were things in what she said that always held him. It was like learning secrets. She was still talking.

"Well, today they're shrieking and vomiting invective and you'd like nothing better than to be the heroic leader of this pack of filthy cowards. Would you? Well, it's not worth while this time. The whole thing'll blow over. In a few weeks people will have forgotten about private banks. And by the time you get the bill into the state legislature the papers will be ignoring the whole business. Do you see? There's nothing so tragic as the spectacle of a mob leader stranded high and dry with a yesterday's crusade. And his mob off in another direction. Remember, George, you're not dealing with people, with reasoning men and women. You always forget this and you'll never get ahead if you keep forgetting it. You're dealing with a single creature—the crowd. A huge bellowing savage."

"I know, I know," Basine muttered. She was crazy. Something queer in her head about people. "All people aren't like that, of course. But I understand."

"You don't," she interrupted angrily. "All people are like that. Alone people are one thing. They're alive and they reason a little. But when they come together to overthrow governments or defend governments or make laws or worship Gods, they vanish. A single creature takes their place. And this single creature is a mysterious savage who howls and spits and vomits and tears its hair and has orgasms of terror and befouls itself."

Her eyes glared at Basine. With an effort she controlled her voice. She continued in a passionate whisper,

"Don't you understand that yet? After all I've shown you. If you want to get ahead, I can make you

anything. Do you hear that? Anything . . . I can make you a leader . . . a king. All you must learn is the way of turning people into swine . . ."

"Please Doris, you get too excited. Please . . ."

"Into swine and swine crusades. We'll find ways of bringing them together and the more swinish you can make people become, yes, the more you can make them spew and shriek, the holier will become the cause of this spewing and shrieking. These are elementals and you must trust me. Do you hear?"

Her fingers were cold. They had closed on his hand. He shuddered. Crazy . . . poor Doris. Gone queer with something. Yet he found himself listening, her chill fingers startling his flesh. Out of her ravings there might issue at any minute the thing he was always looking for . . . a way to get ahead.

"Little crusades like this," she went on, "are all right. But private banks are only a detail. And besides the idea is too concrete to terrify people and bring out the full hysteria of their cowardice. What we need is something vague—that has no facts to handicap it. Something you can lie about wildly and frighten them with so that their bowels weaken. Please, drop the thing now. You must . . ."

"Doris, you get too excited. Let's talk sense instead of getting excited like this."

He patted her hand and returned her stare uncomfortably. He wanted to ask her why she was interested in his getting ahead, in making him a leader. She had paused. Basine felt himself nauseated by the intensity of her words that continued to ring in his ears. Her anger and the viciousness of her phrases

brought her too close to him. He could almost see something behind the glare of her dark eyes.

"Oh, you're not interested in progress and civilization," she resumed mockingly. Her words seemed more controlled. He noticed that she jerked her hand away. "Because if you were you would see that progress and civilization are the results of the terror of the mob. It's when they get frightened of something and throw themselves at it with their eyes shut and their hair on end, that institutions are born . . . that new platitudes are set up in heaven. And the secret is this—the worse swine you can turn them into, the holier will be the things they do. Listen, I'll tell you . . . You must do as I say . . . You must believe me . . ."

She had risen. Her hand was on his shoulder and her eyes burned over him. He felt a bit fearful and impatient. To a point, her talk was interesting. But after that it became like raving.

"You've told me that before," he murmured. "Please calm down." An ecstatic light slowly left her.

"Oh yes. Sense," she whispered. "Well, the sense of it is for you to become a symbol of their holiness. Be a leader. Isn't that it. But the private bank crusade has fizzled. I've read the papers closely and outside of the two attacks on the private bankers last week, there've been no great gestures of righteousness. If they'd hamstrung a few hundred private bankers, cut off their heads and burned down their houses, I'd advise you to stick. That's sense isn't it?"

Basine, listening to the uncomfortable distortions of his sister, made up his mind. He translated her vicious suggestions into the less inconveniencing

idea . . . "The biggest part of the work in the fight against the banks has been done already, Doris. And the rest anybody can do."

"Yes," she smiled, "if you're going to be of service to the public you must be careful to devote yourself to worthwhile reforms. You always had a clearer way of putting things, George."

She despised him. He could feel it now. He looked at her and wondered again. She was beautiful. A complete change had come over her since he'd come in. She seemed warm with emotion, alive, human. But she smiled in an offensive way. He preferred her viciousness. That was impersonal—something queer in her head. This other was a condescension that angered him. He sat thinking; she was playing with him. It would be better if he never saw her.

"How is Henrietta?" she asked.

The question had long ago became an invitation to confession. He avoided her eyes.

"Fanny and Aubrey were over," he answered.

She interrupted. "Please don't talk about them."

"Oh, nothing in particular," he hastened. "Henrietta is the same as ever.

Doris laughed.

"An ideal wife for a future public hero," she exclaimed. Basine frowned.

"I'd rather you didn't make a joke about such things, Doris."

"I'm not joking. But to be a great leader a man must have only one love—the love of being a great leader."

"That's wrong," Basine blurted out. "A woman can help a man forward if he loves her and she's clever and loves him."

"She can't," Doris said softly. "Because she doesn't want to. If she loves him, she doesn't want him to be great. She may inspire him but just as soon as she sees his inspiration takes him away from her, she turns around and tries to ruin him. So she can have him to herself."

Basine listened impatiently. This was a child prattling. Doris was laughing. He looked at her questioningly. Her laughter continued and grew harsh.

"You fool," she sighed, controlling herself. "Oh you fool."

Basine shook his head. He was serious. There were hidden facts in his mind. He knew something about what a woman might do to help a man forward. These facts seemed to him allies—secret allies, as he contradicted his sister.

"I insist you're wrong," he said. He was determined to prove her wrong. But she went on, ignoring his intensity.

"Your wife is ideal, George. Colorless, stupid. Dead. Without desires or egoism. An ideal wife for a man of ambition. The kind that will let you alone."

"Nonsense. You're utterly wrong," he cried. He must prove to her how utterly wrong she was. There was Ruth.

"Men owe most of their success to the impulse the right woman can give them. Henrietta's all right. But she's so damn dead. She's interested in nothing. Just a child with a child's mind and outlook. And she gets more so every year. Good God, if I had somebody with life in her. Keen and . . . who loved me. So that I wanted to be great in her eyes. It would be easier. Somebody . . . like you, Doris."

He paused, confused. "I mean," he added, "your type. The intellectual and female combined."

He had long ago told her of his courtship, of the curious way he had tricked himself into matrimony and she had always laughed at his unhappiness and said this—only a fool tricked himself as he had done. Nevertheless his marriage was ideal.

"Men instinctively pick out what they need," she would say. "And a man like you needs a nonentity like Henrietta. You wait and see. Your happiness isn't coming from emotion inside but from emotion outside—the noise of praise the public will someday give you."

But there were facts now hidden in his head to disprove this. He started as Doris announced casually,

"Ruth Davis may drop in this afternoon."

They finished their tea. A knock on the door frightened him. The girl! No. Doris called, "Come in," and Levine entered. Basine nodded to him.

"I'll have to be going," he said as Levine sat down. He disliked the man. Doris nodded. She appeared to have lost interest in him and, her tea finished, she was sitting back in her chair with her eyes half shut and her hands listless in her lap. Levine was talking quietly . . . "You look tired, Doris. Like to go hear Lindstrum lecture tonight? No? Very well. I just dropped in to see if you would. Come on."

"No," she frowned at him.

"I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I think it would be better for you to . . ."

Her eyes shut him off. They were blazing.

"Please," she cried. Then with a sigh she turned toward the window.

Basine stood up. He pretended a leisureliness, opening a few books and staring with apparent interest at passages in them. Levine and his sister were a strange pair. Doris queer and moody and going into impossible tantrums. And this man with brown negro eyes and a loose-lipped mouth that reeked with sarcasms. There were secrets between them. Nothing wrong, but secrets. He remembered the girl was coming and grew frightened.

"Well, good-bye," he said aloud. "And calm down, Doris."

He waited uncomfortably for her to say something. But she was silent. He looked at his watch and exclaimed in a surprised, matter-of-fact voice, "Oh my! It's almost four. Good-bye. I must run."

He hurried away as if some logical necessity were spurring him on. The makebelieve had been unnecessary for Doris had paid no attention to the manner of his departure.

Outside he paused and looked up and down the street. He felt relieved. He had left in time. Crossing from an opposite corner was Ruth Davis. He would pretend he hadn't seen her and walk on in an opposite direction. He knew she was watching him as she approached. He was frightened. A sense of suffocation. He desired to run away.

She was young. Her eyes had a way of remaining in his thought. When he talked to people, her eyes came before him and looked at him. They asked questions.

The last time he had sat with her in his sister's studio he had gone away with a feeling of panic. He was used to women. Invariably he disliked them.

They seemed to him variants of his wife. They reminded him of Henrietta and he was able to say to himself, "They look attractive and mysterious. But underneath, they're all alike."

He meant they were all like Henrietta. In this way his distaste for his wife had kept him faithful to her because his imagination balked at the idea of embracing another Henrietta.

But Ruth Davis after he had met her a few times, always in his sister's presence, had impressed him differently. Perhaps it was because he had always seen her with his sister. In many ways she reminded him of Doris. She was dark like Doris and had many of her mannerisms.

He had not thought of her as a variant of Henrietta. Rather as a variant of Doris. He had never tested his immunity to her by imagining an embrace. When he talked to her he grew eager to impress her. He wanted her to understand him, not quite as Doris understood him. She was cynical but not in the way Doris was. Her mind was kindlier.

Because he felt frightened now at her approach and a desire to run away without speaking to her, he held himself to the spot. He would get the better of this thing, he told himself quickly, by facing whatever it was and fighting it down. He would overcome the curious effect she had on him by confronting her. In this way, a very high-minded way, he persuaded himself to wait for her and to talk to her. Which was what he wanted to do above everything else.

She was pleased. They shook hands. The confusion left him. He was quite master of himself. Her dark

eyes were not dangerous like his sister's. She was a bright, pretty girl.

"I'm sorry I can't visit with you and Doris," he said. "But I have an engagement."

"Oh." She seemed disappointed. Her eyes betrayed almost a hurt. This made him even more master of himself. He had been foolishly worried about the girl. Just a bright, pretty girl and a friend of his sister.

"By the way," he said, "you were saying the other day that you'd like a job in the state attorney's office. My secretary's quit. Would you like that?"

"Oh, Mr. Basine. That's awfully kind of you. But I . . . I don't know shorthand and I suppose that . . ."

"That makes no difference," he smiled tolerantly. "I need somebody able to look after things in general. If you want the job, why come down and see me tomorrow morning about ten and we'll start work."

"I'd be delighted," she answered. She was about to say more but he grew curt.

"You'll excuse me, won't you. I have to run," he said. "See you at ten tomorrow, eh?" He wanted to make the thing certain because otherwise he would have to hire someone else. "At ten then," he repeated.

"If you really want me."

"I think you'll get along all right. And I need somebody at once."

He walked away with a feeling of mastery. He had overcome the confusion the sight of her had started in him. He was sincerely glad of that. He disliked idea of entanglements. Politics was a glass house

and entanglements were dangerous. Then besides, there was Henrietta.

His fidelity to his wife was a habit that had become almost an obsession. His distaste and frequent revulsion toward her made him concentrate excitedly upon the idea of fidelity.

By assuring himself of the nobility of faithfulness and of its necessity as a matter of high decency, he vindicated in a measure the fact that he seemed too cowardly to philander. He had felt this cowardliness and was continually trying to distort it into more self-ennobling emotions. This was what made him so excited a champion of domestic felicity, marital fidelity and kindred ideas. He was able to convert himself into a man whose ideals prevented him from succumbing to his lower instincts. Thus instead of feeling ashamed of the cowardliness which kept him from doing what he desired, he felt on the contrary, proud of his capacity for living up to his high ideals, which meant—of doing what he didn't want to do.

This cowardliness was an involved emotion. It was inspired by a fear of detection, if he philandered, a fear of physical and social consequences. But more than that and too curious for his thought to unravel, it was inspired by a fear of hurting Henrietta. This fear was the predominant factor in his life.

He sought at times to understand it but its understanding eluded him. He had been tempted at times to talk to Doris about it. But as yet it was a confession withheld.

The greater his distaste for his wife became and the more the thought of her grew obnoxious, the deeper did this fear of hurting her take form in him.

Often when driven to anger by her increasing stupidity he would lie awake at night by her side thinking of her in accidents which might kill her. He would lie awake picturing her brought home dying—and going over in his fancy the details of her death scene.

And then as if the thing were too sweet to relinquish, he would go over in his mind the details of the funeral, picturing himself beside the grave weeping, picturing her father and the numerous mourners; giving them words to say and assigning them little parts in the drama of the burial. The thing would become a completely worked out scene—like a careful description in a novel.

Then he would picture himself returning home with his children. He would close his eyes and play with the fancy impersonally, as if he were dictating it for writing. Back from the grave with his children . . . The house empty of Henrietta. The chair in which she always sat and sewed, empty. And she would never sit there again. The chair would always be empty.

At this point his fancy would grow sad. At first the sadness would be as if it were part of the make-believe—as if this fiction figure of himself were mourning the death of his wife. But gradually the sadness would change and become real. It would become a sadness inspired by the thought of her dying . . . sometime. Someday she would be dead and he would be alone. And this idea would grow unbearable. Just as it had been deliciously desirable a few minutes before.

The sadness that came to him then was no more than a remorse he felt for having in his fancy planned

and executed her death. A remorse inspired by his feeling of guilt. But to Basine it seemed a sadness inspired by some inner love for his wife. It would surprise him, that there was an inner love, and he would lie and think, "Oh, I don't want her dead. I love her. Poor, dear Henrietta." And he would reach over and caress her tenderly, tears filling his eyes.

It was at such moments while doing penance for the imaginative murder of his wife, that a physical passion for her would come to him. His caresses would grow warmer and in the possession of her which followed, he would be able to blot out of his memory the unbearable self-accusation aroused by his desire for her death. Thus his fear of hurting her, even of contradicting her in any way which would make her unhappy, was a device which guarded him against contemplating the impulse concealed in him—to get rid of her even by murdering her.

His fidelity to his wife, inspired more by this fear of hurting her than by the social cowardice which involved the idea of detection, had become a fetish with him. The less he desired her and the more repugnant she grew for him, the more desperately he defended to himself and to others the virtues of marital faithfulness.

He had advanced in eight years into an intolerant champion of morality. Even his political orations bristled with panegyrics on the sanctity of the home and the high duty men owed their wives. The thing repeated itself over and over in his day, haunted his night and filtered through all his public and private actions. It had formed the basis of a new Basine—the moral champion. It had colored his ambitions and

determined his direction of thought. It hammered—a hidden psychological refrain through the fibers of his thought. . . In order to reconcile himself to the distasteful rôle he had foisted upon himself by accidentally embracing Henrietta in his mother's kitchen nine years ago, he must eulogize his predicament and convince himself and others that all deviations were a vicious and dishonorable matter. Held by neither love nor desire to the side of a woman he had tricked himself into marrying, he managed to bind himself to her by the stern worship of a code which proclaimed fidelity the highest manifestation of the soul.

As he walked toward a street car he was proud of his self-conquest. He was thinking about the girl, Ruth. He had taken himself in hand and overcome the dangerous confusion that the sight of her started. His sense of honor preened itself on the victory. That was the way to handle oneself—always face the facts. It was better than hiding one's head in the sand. Look, it had happened this way. By being matter-of-fact, by converting the girl from a luring, enigmatic figure into an employee, he had established an immunity in himself. Was he certain of this? Yes, she would be merely another of the young women employed in his office. And he was in love with none of them. Or even interested. So their relation would be that of employee and employer. Which was harmless and honorable.

He walked along, piling up assurances. As he entered the car he was going over in his mind with an imaginative eagerness the details of the situation he had created. He would be very stern, aloof. He would acquaint her with his secret files and gradually

educate her into an efficient assistant. She was a university girl. Of course her running around with freaks, the way she did—artists and talky women, was a handicap. But she would get over that and become entirely sensible.

It was a pleasant day dream that wiled away the tedium of the ride home. An unaccountable happiness played around the fancies in his mind. He gave himself to its warmth with a certain defiance—as if he were denying unbidden doubts underlying his dreams.

He had hired Ruth Davis in order that he might be near her. And underlying the enthusiastic assurances which he crowded into his mind as a stop gap for the elation this fact inspired, was the knowledge that, as his secretary, she would come to perceive what a great man he was. His files, his secret memoranda, his intricate activities all of which she would come to know as his private secretary—would be a boast.

Yes, his very curtness, sternness, preoccupation would all be part of this boast. She would see him as a man of importance, a man of rising power. He would have to ignore her in order to confer with well-known men-politicians, police officials, party leaders. And this ignoring of her would be a boast—all a boast of his prestige and of the fact that he was a man of fascinating activities and that these activities made it impossible for him to devote himself as other lesser men might, to paying her any attention.

Yes, the thought of her being in his office where he might look at her, but more especially where she might look at him—for he did not intend to pay any attention to her—thrilled him. And gradually the cause of his elation protruded and he was forced to face it.

He alighted from the car thinking as he walked toward his apartment.

"I'll have to be careful though. I don't want her to fall in love. That would be embarassing. Girls are susceptible. I'll not encourage her in anything like that. Be businesslike and aloof. Treat her absolutely as a stranger."

This idea thrilled him further. It would be sweet to ignore her, even to be strict with her and carping at times, to scold for some error. Yes, that was the right way to handle the situation.

And he walked on with a childish smile over his face. He had determined upon a high-minded course which absolved him from all blame in anything that might happen. Aloofness, sternness. Now that they were going to be together every day, he already looked upon her position as his secretary as an inevitable predicament not brought on by any action of his; now that they were to be that close, he would rigorously observe all the conventions.

At the same time he was inwardly aware that such a course as he had mapped for himself would unquestionably have a certain effect upon the girl. It must. It would cause her to respect and admire him and finally to fall in love with him. Tremendously in love since there would be no outlet for her passion. Oh yes, that would certainly happen. But it wouldn't be his fault and nothing would come of it. Because he would remain sternly aloof.

The thought of being worshipped from afar, of being looked upon all day by eyes that adored him, brought an excitement into his step. And he ran up the stairs to his apartment. He was eager to enter his home and greet his wife. She had become suddenly a

tolerable person, one whose presence he might even enjoy. He felt happy and he wanted her to share his happiness.

14

Fanny listened carelessly to her husband. After eight years, listening to what Aubrey had to say had become unnecessary. Because his talk never changed. What he said yesterday he would say tomorrow. He prided himself on this. He explained that it revealed him a man of unswerving principles. Fanny, who had become a rather sarcastic person, kept her answer to herself. A man of unswerving principles was a great asset to the community. But a terrible bore to his home.

She sat watching Henrietta sew. There was a placidity about Henrietta that always irritated her. Henrietta was still pretty although beginning to fade. Her eyes were colorless and her lips were getting thinner. But she seemed happy and Fanny wondered about this.

Mr. Mackay seemed very attentive to Henrietta. Of course, Mr. Mackay was Aubrey's partner and a friend of her brother, George. But it was odd to call on Henrietta unexpectedly and find her talking alone to a man in her library. Even to Mr. Mackay.

Fanny was suspicious about such things. She had been utterly faithful to Aubrey during their married life and this fidelity, somehow, had developed in her an attitude of chronic suspicion concerning the fidelity of other women. It was her habit when visiting her friends to sit and speculate upon their possible immoralities. She had frequently got herself into trouble by setting scandalous rumors afloat.

"Henry Thorpe and Gwendolyn see quite a great deal of each other," she would say. "More than we know, I think. I wonder what Mrs. Thorpe thinks about it. You know Gwendolyn, for all her pretenses, is an out and out sensual type."

No one was immune from Fanny's speculations. In fact the more incongruous the idea of any one's sinfulness seemed, the more enthusiastically Fanny embraced it.

She was more than half aware that thinking about others in immoral situations seemed to excite herself. She would endeavor to introduce a note of indignation into her speculations. But the note was too forced to deceive her, although it deceived others. And she finally abandoned herself to the thrill which thinking evilly of others stirred in her.

She would often allow her suspicions to become detailed. Merely to suspect a woman of being immoral was not as satisfying as to figure the manner of her sin, the play by play, word by word drama of her seduction. She relished such fancied details. Suspecting others of immorality enabled Fanny to enjoy vicariously situations which she had as a matter of course denied herself.

Her love for Aubrey had not changed. It had, in fact, grown or at least become inflated by habit. At the beginning of their union she had suspected him of being a hypocrite. She had immediately resented his virtue. Then for a short time she had figured out that he must be unfaithful to her, that this accounted for his virtue.

But her resentment had remained mute. The years had proved to her, as much as proof was possible, that Aubrey was no hypocrite and that his attitude

toward such things was due to his being a high-minded, decent man. He loved her. But in his own way. He explained to her, "Most marriages are ruined because people are lead astray by sex. Sex is a duty. I don't think it's any more moral for married people to wallow in sex than it is for unmarried people. Sex has an object beyond itself which people ignore. It is a means to an end—children." And they had gone on for eight years living up to these standards. But they had no children. Fanny was willing to acquiesce in her husband's ideals, since she had to, in everything except about children. She didn't want any.

Fanny had accepted his version of the thing and lived by it. There were some rewards. She managed to derive a dubious satisfaction during their infrequent hours of passion from the knowledge that he was a famous man. She also found a source of secret excitement in his austerity and virtue. The fact that he was so high-minded and aloof from any thought of sex offered a piquant contrast to occasions when he condescended to be her lover. Such occasions were for Fanny far from austere and high-minded. She allowed the keen sensuality of her nature free reign. Aubrey's noble attitude served to inspire her with a sense of guilt, as if their relations were really as indecent and immoral as he contended sex to be. And the idea of their being indecent and immoral heightened her enjoyment of them.

She wondered at many things about Aubrey. Despite his aversion to sex, (she did not think of it as an aversion but as a high-mindedness,) he was yet very attentive to women. Not in the way that most men were attentive. But chivalrously. He had become during their married life a veritable Chesterfield and

Sir Raleigh. It was not only his manner—his observation of little rules of conduct such as rising when a woman entered or helping her on with her wraps, or assisting her to pull up her chair at the table or opening doors or any of the thousand niceties—that marked his attitude toward women. It was also his ideas. He frequently discussed women and his point of view was more chivalrous than most men's. He said that he believed in the fineness of women. That a woman was a pure, beautiful soul. And he was quick to resent insults to women, even general insults which sought to reflect upon woman's purity as a whole or to make her out a scheming sexual animal.

Fanny was proud of his chivalrous tone. It distinguished him and she did not resent the fact that it interested women. She had never been jealous of Aubrey. And she had gradually accustomed herself to his high-mindedness. She would have liked abandoned caresses and embraces. But these had never been forthcoming, even on their honeymoon long ago. And she had given up dreaming of them—for herself. She dreamed about them now in connection with others and her mind, colored by unsatisfied desires, indulged itself in the luxurious and lascivious details of her suspicions of others.

She sat watching Henrietta as Mr. Mackay talked to her and despite an effort to control her thought, she began to wonder what they had been doing alone in the apartment before she and Aubrey came. He had probably taken her hand and pulled her to him, put his arms around her and Henrietta, overcome with a sudden passion, had probably flung her arms about his shoulders and given him her lips wildly. And just as they were standing deliriously embraced like

that, the bell had probably rung and Henrietta had jumped away and grabbed her sewing. She had come to the door with her sewing in her hand and . . .

Fanny smiled at the colorless and unsuspecting Henrietta. Her sense of humor had done for her what her sense of justice had failed to do. It controlled her fancies. To imagine Henrietta giving her lips wildly to anybody, particularly the red-faced Mr. Mackay, was ludicrous. Poor Henrietta with her two noisy children and her interminable sewing. She didn't envy her the children. Thank Heaven, despite Aubrey's high-minded attitude toward sex as a distasteful mechanism through which the race continued itself, they had had no children.

There was something pitiful about Henrietta. She was so dumb. And even when she dressed up and powdered and frilled, she always seemed tired. A stranger might think she was an invalid just recovered from some serious illness . . . Henrietta was probably like Aubrey about "those things". Very high-minded and aloof.

Mr. Mackay and Aubrey were talking about advertising now. They always did this soon or late. And they usually quarreled because Aubrey was inclined to insist that his end of the business—the preparation of copy and ad. material—was as important as Mr. Mackay's end. Mr. Mackay was in charge of the salesmen.

She hadn't wanted to call on her brother. But Aubrey insisted. There was a deal on. The city was going to do a lot of advertising and the firm of Mackay-Gilchrist wanted the job. Basine could help them pull wires.

The bell rang and interrupted their talk.

"That must be George," Henrietta exclaimed. She grew nervous and began to flutter. The maid was out for the afternoon and she went to the door herself. A strange voice came from the hall as the door opened.

"Oh, come right in. George isn't home but I expect him any minute," Henrietta greeted the arrival. Paul Schroder, one of the attorneys who worked in the mysterious place called the state attorney's office with her husband, entered.

He was younger than her husband and of a type she disliked. She didn't like George to have him as a friend. He was too brutal looking. And too noisy. Her submission to George had developed a keen set of prejudices in her. She liked only people who reminded her of her husband—normal-sized, thin men with aristocratic manners, and quick nervous eyes. And what she liked in such people was only the parts of them that seemed like George. All other kinds of men annoyed her. Particularly the kind Schroder was —rough, coarse and laughing too loudly always. She thought of him as a vulgar animal and once or twice hinted to George that she didn't like to have him visit the house.

Schroder entered, his blond, well shaped head tossing dramatically. The exuberance of his manner gave him the air of being larger than he was. Aubrey Gilchrist when he straightened up was taller than Schroder and Mr. Mackay's shoulders were broader. But somehow the blond-headed man dwarfed them both as he shook hands with them. He sat down next to Fanny.

"Well," he said to her, "how you been? Bright-eyed as ever." He laughed and Fanny smiled.

"What's the matter with friend husband," he turned to Henrietta. "Can't you keep His Nobs home like a God-fearing man on Sundays?"

Henrietta winced.

"He went to see his sister who is ill," she said. "He'll be back any minute."

"Oh, that's all right," Schroder answered, as if Henrietta had apologized and he was forgiving her. Then to Aubrey he added, "What are you two pirates after from Basine?"

Aubrey raised his eyebrows. He was subject to quick dislikes. Schroder was one of them. Schroder was the kind of person who had no respect for merit or his superiors. The world, unfortunately, was full of such people—boors lacking the intelligence to perceive their betters. Aubrey always felt ill at ease in their presence.

Although he had written no novels for five years, in his own mind he was still a literary figure of importance. He had gone into the advertising business, but not permanently. He had intended at first remaining in it only for a year and then returning to his writing. He wanted to do a different sort of writing and a vacation was necessary. He wanted to do something real. He had, as a matter of fact, lost interest in the business of turning out narratives. Worried at the time by this loss of interest in his work he had explained it as "an ambition for better things."

But five years had passed and he was still an advertising man. The firm of Mackay and Gilchrist had grown. He flattered himself that its success had been due to his personal prestige. People said, "Oh, that's Aubrey Gilchrist, the writer. Well, that's quite an asset for an advertising concern." And so they

brought their business to Mackay-Gilchrist.

He disliked Schroder because on the few occasions they had met, the man had exuberantly ignored the fact he was Aubrey Gilchrist. Schroder was a man who had no interest in anything outside himself—a noisy, self-satisfied creature with no reason to be noisy or self-satisfied. He had never done anything.

"I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Schroder," Aubrey answered stiffly.

"Ho ho," Schroder exclaimed, "your husband is insulted, Mrs. Gilchrist. Well, I apologize. There's George, I'll lay you dollars to doughnuts."

The bell had rung. Basine entered. Aubrey looked significantly at his partner. The significance was due to the fact that Schroder seemed likely to ruin the visit. Aubrey announced aloud after the greetings:

"Thought we'd drop in for a private discussion, George."

Henrietta was smiling tenderly at her husband.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"Well, I've got great news for you," Basine exclaimed. The company looked hopefully at him.

"What, dear?"

"Oh, I'll tell you tonight, little girl."

"If it's good news we'd all like to hear it," Fanny insisted.

Schroder regarded his friend askance. He suspected something. He had left Basine yesterday night and there had been no hint of anything happening. And today being Sunday . . . He smiled to himself. "Covering up," he thought. "Husbands are comical." He decided not to press Basine. He had evidently been up to something . . . "playing a

matinee." He noticed that his friend was trying to change the subject.

"Is it something personal?" Henrietta asked with a frown. "You frighten me, George, when you don't tell me things."

Basine, sitting down, beamed with enthusiasm on the group, on his home.

"Where are the children?" he asked.

"Over at the Harveys," Henrietta answered.

"Well," said her husband with an explosive intonation, "I've made up my mind to go after the circuit court. There's a chance next April."

"Going to run for Judge, eh?" Schroder asked with interest.

"Yes sir," Basine laughed. "I just had a session with some of the boys this afternoon and we discussed it."

"Oh, I thought you were at Doris'," Henrietta interrupted.

"I did see her," Basine answered, "but only for a few seconds. I spent most of the afternoon in conference."

"Congratulations," Aubrey spoke. "Mac and I were going to . . ."

Schroder stood up.

"What do you say if we take a walk, Mrs. Gilchrist," he whispered loudly. "Your husband insists that I get out. And I won't unless you come along."

He laughed good-naturedly until Aubrey smiled, and nodded to his wife.

"If you wish, Fanny."

"It's awfully nice outside," Fanny agreed after a pause during which she looked carefully out of the

window. Basine reached for his wife's hand and drew her toward his chair.

"You're looking very well," he smiled at her. A pleasant light came to her eyes. For a moment the youthfulness that people had once admired when they had called her "such an enthusiastic girl" returned to her manner.

"Oh now George!" she exclaimed. Basine felt a catch in his heart. A remorse, as if he had done something, came over him. He patted her hand tenderly. Henrietta repeated but in an almost colorless voice, "Oh, George."

Schroder followed Fanny down the steps. As the door of the Basine apartment closed behind them, his fingers clutched her elbow and he leaned against her in a straightforward, jovial manner.

Her experience as a married woman had brought a directness into Fanny's mind. She no longer found it necessary to conceal her thoughts from herself. She was still inclined to be publicly innocent but her mental life had taken on the proportions of an endless debauch. Marriage not only legalized sex but removed the barriers to thinking about it. She felt herself blushing childishly as Schroder, squeezing her arm opened the door with a flourish.

15

The Gilchrist home on Lake Shore drive was crowded with friends and relatives. They had come to the funeral of William Gilchrist. Mr. Gilchrist lay in a coffin in the drawing room, a waxen-faced figure under a glass cover. Flowers filled the large room with a damp, sweet odor.

It was a spring morning. The air was colored with

rain. A sulphurous glow lay on the pavements. It was chilly. Automobiles lined the curb outside the Gilchrist stone house. Polite, sober-faced people arrived in couples and groups and walked seriously up the stone steps of the residence, a swarm of mummers striving awkwardly to register grief.

Dignitaries from different strata were assembling. The Gilchrists were a family whose prestige was ramified by varied contacts. Celebrities of the society columns arrived—famous tea pourers, tiara wearers, charity patronesses. Professional men ranging from retired fuddy-duddies, applying their waning financial talents to the diversion of philanthropy, to corporation heads, prominent legal advisors and medical geniuses renowned for their taciturnity—these came for Mrs. Gilchrist. Bankers, merchants, industrial captains, hospital bigwigs—these came as husbands and also as contemporaries of Mr. Gilchrist.

The leaders of the city's arts—a sprinkling of painters aping the manners of dapper business men, of authors vastly superior to the Bohemian nature of their calling, of advertising Napoleons, opera followers, national advertisers—these came for Aubrey. Fanny, through her brother who had a month before been elected a judge, drew a formidable group of names—political factotums, powers behind thrones, mystic local Cromwells. Also the Younger Set. Added to these were relatives, business associates and finally the Press.

There was a dead man under a glass cover in the house and the distinguished company, crowding the large somber rooms of the Gilchrist home, eyed each other gravely and addressed each other in whispers. The dead man could not hear, yet they spoke in

whispers. Even the most renowned of the dignitaries whose lives were a round of formalities almost as impressive as this, spoke in whispers and seemed ill at ease.

They drifted about like nervous butlers and took up positions against the walls, striking uncertain attitudes. They exchanged polite and sober greetings and felt slightly strengthened in spirit at the sight of people as distinguished as themselves. The camaraderie of prestige—the social caress which celebrities alone are able to bestow upon each other by basking in a mutual feeling of superiority—ran like an undercurrent through the scene.

Yet this camaraderie which usually heightened the poise of such gatherings was unable to remove the embarrassment of the company. They spoke in whispers and remained outsiders, as if the Gilchrists were a family of intimidating superiors in whose presence one didn't quite know what to do with one's arms or feet or what to say or just how to make one's features look.

The intimidating superiority was the body under the glass cover of the coffin. It would have been easier in a church. Funerals were much less of a strain in a church and there were several whispers to this effect. Why had Mrs. Gilchrist insisted upon a home funeral? Wasn't it rather old fashioned?

Here in a house death seemed uncomfortably personal. The stage was too small and the mourners were too near something. A curious sympathy that had nothing to do with Mr. Gilchrist took possession of them.

The damp, sweet odor of the flowers, the glimpse of the black coffin, the sound of softly moving feet

and whispering tongues were a distressing ensemble. The mourners drifted around and nodded nervously at each other as if they were doing all they could to make the best of a faux pas. Death was a faux pas. A reality without adjectives. A stark, mannerless lie. The family had done its best also. Flowers had been heaped, furniture arranged, the body dressed, a luxurious coffin purchased, great people invited. Nevertheless the waxen-faced one under the glass cover refused to yield its reality. It lay stark and mannerless in the large room—the immemorial skeleton at the feast—repeating the dreadful word "death" with an almost humorous persistency amid the heaped flowers, the carved furniture, the mourners with raised eyebrows. They stood about nervously.

Gilchrist had been a man alive, one of those whose names were known to the world. The name Gilchrist had meant a large building stored with rugs, period furniture; innumerable clerks, departments, delivery trucks, advertisements in newspapers and on fences. The man Gilchrist had been one with whom the dignitaries of the city had shared the intimacy of prestige.

They had said Gilchrist's was a fine store, Gilchrist's was marvelous furniture, Gilchrist was a highly successful business man. Gilchrist was this and that and the other. And here lay Gilchrist, waxen and unscrupulously silent, under a glass cover—a little man with pale sideburns that were now doubly useless, in a black suit and his hands folded over his chest. Here lay Gilchrist dead, and yet the things that had been called Gilchrist still lived. As if immortality was an artifice, superior to life. The furniture store, the furniture, the clerks, trucks, advertisements, the highly successful business—all these still lived. And this was

an uncomfortable fact. It embarrassed the mourners. They drifted about with uncertainty.

Like Gilchrist they were men and women whose names were synonymous with great activities. Like Gilchrist, they were considered as the inspiration of these activities. In fact the activities were an artificial symbol of themselves—a sort of photograph of themselves. Yet like Gilchrist, all of them would lie under a glass cover some day and nothing would be changed. The actitivies that everybody called by their names would still live. As if they had had nothing to do with them. As if these symbols were the life of the city and not the men and women whom they symbolized. Yes, as if these activities which represented their prestige were independent individualities—masks which loaned themselves for a few years to them to wear. And which they took off when they lay stretched under a glass cover. Which they would take off and become anonymous.

For who was this waxen-faced man in the coffin? Nobody knew. They had called him Gilchrist. But Gilchrist was clerks, advertisements, furniture, and business. This man in the coffin was someone else, an irritating impostor that reminded them they were all impostors. Death was a confession everyone must make; an incongruous confession. An ending to something that had no ending. Life and its activities, even the activities that bore the name Gilchrist, went on. Yet Gilchrist had, mysteriously, come to an end. He lay in a coffin while his name in large letters talked to other names in the advertisements of the city.

The camaraderie of prestige was insufficient to remove this embarrassment. A dead man under a glass cover spoke to them slyly. Dinners, even very

formal dinners with butlers; cliques, even powerful cliques wielding financial destinies; ambitions, board of directors' meetings, investments and reinvestments, hopes and successes—ah, these were deceptive little excitements that were not a part of life—but an artifice superior to life. For life ended and the little excitements went on. They were the surface immortality in which one conveniently forgot the underlying fact of death.

Alas, death. Alas, waxen-faced men lying silent and mannerless under glass covers. A distasteful faux pas, death. Yet some of the company must weep. Not friends who regretted the everlasting absence of William Gilchrist, but men and women bewildered for a moment by the memory of their own death. Death was a memory since it existed like a foregone conclusion. It was sad to think of all the people who had died, laughing ones, famous ones, adventurous ones whose laughter, fame and adventure seemed somehow a lie now that they were dead.

It was so easy to be dead. Death had come to all who had been, even to more dignified and celebrated ones than they. Alas, death. The sober men and women in the Gilchrist home drifted about nervously. They must weep because for the moment they lay in the coffin with Mr. Gilchrist and because for the moment they walked sadly about mourning visions of their own deaths. And for the moment their tears earned for themselves the regard of their fellow mourners as kind-hearted, sensitive, unselfish souls.

Yet there was something intimate among the company. Despite the embarrassment, a curious spirit of friendliness underlay the scene. Men and women who knew each other only as aloof symbols of prestige,

stood together and talked in whispers as if they were talking out of character. Half strangers felt a familiarity toward each other.

Under the stamp of a common emotion and a common embarrassment, the company became for the time a collection of intimates, looking at one another and whispering among themselves as if the event were a truce. This was a funeral. Here was reality. And it was polite to lay aside for an hour the masks, the complexities of artifice by which they baffled and impressed each other.

The Reverend Henry Peyton had arrived and the mourners moved into the spacious library, grateful for a destination. The widow in black with her son and daughter-in-law appeared. The company surveyed them with a thrill of vicarious grief. Poor Mrs. Gilchrist, so strong and competent! It seemed almost impossible that she should lose anything, even something as mortal as a husband. She was so fixed and determined. Even now there was something sternly competent about her grief. It was hidden under a black veil. There was nothing to be seen of it but a black veil and a black dress and a pair of wrinkled little hands fumbling with themselves. Poor Mrs. Gilchrist. People had forgotten she was a woman. They felt slightly ashamed as they glanced at her now, as if they were intruding upon a secret. But she had invited them.

A suppressed "Ah!" of sympathy murmured through the room. The minister's words began and a determined hush followed.

Basine sitting in a corner of the room with his mother had spent an uncomfortable hour waiting for the services. He had looked at the body and come

away depressed. His quick eyes had observed the company and noted with a concealed smile the manner in which lesser dignitaries were making hay while the tears poured. They were utilizing the camaraderie of prestige and the intimacy of a common emotion to impress themselves upon the greater dignitaries. Women of dubious social standing gravitated as if by general accident toward women of solid social standing and exchanged whispered condolences with them. Men of lesser financial ratings were edging toward leaders of finance and engaging them in dolorous conversations.

Under the depression and gentle bewilderment, the everlasting business of inferior pursuing superior and superior increasing his superiority by resisting pursuit, was going on. The death of poor Gilchrist seemed to Basine, for a few minutes, chiefly important as an opportunity by which lesser mourners were introducing themselves to the attention of greater mourners.

Basine's eyes noticed another undercurrent. He had himself influenced Fanny to prevail upon Mrs. Gilchrist to invite a number of politicians to the funeral. He had furnished the names carefully, telling Fanny that these were men high in power who had been friends of Mr. Gilchrist. The widow, through her secretary, had asked ten of the list to honor her husband's funeral with their presence. She had chosen ten names most familiar to her, among them men of wealth who were renowned as powers behind the various political thrones of the day. The invitations had served Basine to make a slight but important impression upon the political party leaders.

He had at first felt nervous over Mrs. Gilchrist's selections from his list. She had picked ten men, most

of whom were engaged in tenacious political antagonisms. He watched now with surprise as the antagonists gravitated together forming, with a number of financiers, an amiable, dignified group.

"In the presence of death they feel inclined to bury the hatchet," he thought and the idea of large funerals as an asset for establishing political harmony developed in his mind.

He noticed a change in his own attitude toward Aubrey. He had felt for years a distaste for the man and although their relations had always been amicable, this distaste had increased to a point where Basine would have felt a relief at the man's death. He could never tell himself why he disliked Aubrey. But the aversion was of long standing. "I don't like his looks," he would grin to himself.

Now, watching him take his seat beside his mother, Aubrey became somehow human and Basine felt he understood the man for the first time. Beneath people whose looks you didn't like was always something human. People were all alike, no matter how they strutted or posed. Underneath was a loneliness —a little crippled likeness of themselves—that they carried about with them all the time. Basine would have liked to talk to him and say something like, "Sorry, old man. I didn't know. I'm sorry . . . "

The minister had begun. He stood beside the coffin that had been brought in. His opening words startled Basine. A prayer! There was something fantastic in the spectacle of this living man standing beside the dead man and talking aloud to someone who was not in the room. Talking solemnly, intensely to God. As if he had buttonholed Him.

Basine felt irritated by his own emotions. His face

assumed a devout air but the emotions and the thoughts which rose from them persisted behind his determined piety. He wanted to immerse himself in the spirit of the man praying. But his eyes played truant. They wandered furtively and observed with uncomfortable precision the bowed head of Henrietta and the spring hat on her head and the heavy-jowled face of her father, belligerently reverent beside her.

The minister's voice shouted. "God in Heaven . . . his heavenly soul . . . his heavenly reward. . . "

Phrases like these detached themselves and lingered in Basine's ears. He had heard them frequently in church. But for the moment they seemed preposterously new. He found himself listening in surprise. Religion had been always an accepted idea to him. Something you believed in as you believed in the necessity of neckties. But though he accepted it and felt a casual faith in an Episcopalian God, it remained an idea apart from reality. He had never given either thought or emotion to religion. Yet he had frequently expended a great deal of mental effort and emotion denouncing people whom he sensed or observed were opposed to religion.

It struck him now as a childish farce—an absurd hocus-pocus. Poor Gilchrist going to heaven and a long-faced man in a black coat speeding his soul heavenward from the Gilchrist library! If there was a God, for whom was all this necessary—the flowers, speeches, prayers? Not for God. But for the people in the room, of course. People crowded in a tiny room taking this opportunity to assure each other that the immensities over their heads, the clouds, stars and spaces were their property.

His iconoclasm increased as if inspired by the length

of the minister's harangue. He grew angry with himself and thought of Doris and immediately transferred his anger to her. It was she who was deriding the solemnity of the scene. He had been paying too much attention to her almost insane chatter and things were somewhat undermined in his own soul. Her fault.

The prayer ended and four men came forward and began to sing. Their voices, raised in a hymn, annoyed him instantly. This was too much. What were they singing for? As if their songs would help poor Gilchrist mount from the library into heaven. The entire scene, the bowed heads, sad faces, elaborate coffin; the flowers, the worthy reverend and the singers came to his mind as something terribly unconvincing. Futile, that was it. Children making an unconvincing pretense.

He tried to blot out his thinking and fastened his will upon thoughts that might make him sad, properly sad and believing. What if Henrietta should die . . . Henrietta dead. Henrietta gone forever. He seized the thought eagerly. It was not what he wanted but there was a relish in thinking it. Sad . . . sad . . . yes, if his mother should die or somebody dear to him. Who? Ruth. Ah, what if it were Ruth in the coffin. Instead of anybody else. He would feel differently then. Her beautiful face white as Gilchrist's and her arms still. Her fingers rigid. Ruth dead . . .

This made him sad but it took his mind entirely from the scene. He forgot for moments that Gilchrist was dead and this was a funeral. The reality returned, however, with an increased vividness to its absurdity. The music of the hymn rose with embarrassing frankness . . . Poor little people gathered

in a room going through a hocus-pocus to convince themselves that there was a heaven where they would live forever after the misfortune of death. Like children playing with dolls and pretending. . . . But how did he happen to be thinking like that? Did he believe there was no God, no heaven, no after life?

No, he believed in all that firmly. Of course, one must believe. The self-questioning had shocked him back into a state of grace. Yes, he believed firmly and bowed his head to the hymn that was ending.

During the rest of the services he was inwardly silent. The scene appeared to have slipped into focus again. The minister seemed no longer a symbol of some childish hocus-pocus but an ambassador of God —a stern man, closely in touch with the Mysteries. And there was something awesome in the room. There was something awesome about the coffin and the flowers and the voices of the singers trailing into an Amen. It was God. Yes, a great all powerful Being to whose hands mankind returned.

The discomfort of doubt left Basine and he felt himself again an integral part of something vaster than himself. His thought re-entered the idea of religion and a sense of peace filled him. He said Amen twice and looked with mute, believing eyes at the black coffin.

The mourners were following the six silk-hatted pall bearers into the street. A drizzle over the pavements. A long line of motors, chauffeurs waiting, looking as aloof and aristocratic in their servitude as their employers.

Basine found himself beside Milton Ware, one of the big traction officials of the city. A grey-haired man with a well-preserved face stamped with cer-

tainties and stern affabilities. Basine thought casually that Ware had seemed rather friendly. He had come over to exchange remarks several times while waiting for the services to begin. On the curb Basine looked around for Henrietta. Judge Smith had brought his machine and they were to drive to the cemetery together.

"Are you with anyone?" Ware asked quietly.

"Yes, I'm looking for my party," Basine answered. He spied the judge and Henrietta crowded into their car. Several others had entered with them. Ware followed his eye.

"That looks rather full," he suggested. "If you don't mind, would you take a place in my machine."

Basine nodded. "Thank you. I'll just talk to them a minute then."

He returned from his father-in-law's automobile and entered with Ware. The chauffeur started off and Basine leaned back in his seat. He wondered at Ware's hospitality. The man was one of the outstanding powers of the city, incredibly ramified through banks and corporations and public utilities. He wondered what his connection with Gilchrist had been. The traction baron—a title given him by the newspapers—sat in silence beside him as the procession got under way. Basine's curiosity began to answer itself. He found himself vaguely on his guard.

"I hadn't intended going to the cemetery," Ware announced after they had been riding a few minutes. "I don't believe much in such demonstrations."

"Neither do I," Basine answered. He was wondering if it were possible to escape his duty to the family.

There was such a crowd he might not be missed at the grave.

"Would you mind if we turned out at one of these streets and drove to the club," Ware asked deferentially.

Basine hesitated. He had noticed the invitation in the remark. Ware, whom he had only met once before, was inviting him to the club. Why? A desire to attach himself to Ware abruptly edited his doubts concerning the propriety of his absence.

"I'd just as soon," he answered. The chauffeur was given directions. The remainder of the ride was passed in silence.

"I thought we might have lunch here," Ware explained as they seated themselves in front of a window overlooking the boulevard. It was raining. The empty street gleamed and darkened with rain.

"Most of the forenoon is gone anyway," Ware added. "Have you an engagement?"

"Thanks, I haven't," Basine answered. They sat sipping at highballs a servant had brought. Basine watched the rain and a figure scurrying past below the window. About this time they were lowering Gilchrist into the ground. No one would ever see his face again.

"Pretty sad about Gilchrist," Ware murmured as if aware of his thought.

Basine's attention returned to the traction baron. The man wanted something. Or why should he seek him out? An anger came into his mind. Who was this man Ware that he could pick him up and cart him to a club and buy him a highball—and expect to impress him, Basine? And for what reason? The man wanted something.

The idea had become a conviction. He sensed it now through the memories of the morning. Ware had led up to it dexterously. A nod at first. Later a few remarks about the weather. Finally an invitation to ride with him to the cemetery. Ware had never intended going there. That had been a ruse to—kidnap him. Basine frowned. Well, he was kidnapped. And he would find out why. Find out directly.

Ware was looking at him with a smile. Basine saw something in the smile that increased his anger. A sudden wave of emotion, as if he were going to strike the man, propelled his thoughts out of him. He heard himself talking in a precise, indignant voice and regretted it at once. But the words continued:

"You're a rather busy man, Mr. Ware. And so am I. What did you want to ask me?"

Ware nodded slowly and thrust out his lower lip.

"Exactly," he murmured. "I wanted to speak to you about something."

"Well . . ." He paused on the word but Ware remained silent. He would have liked to out-silence the traction official but after a pause, a nervousness possessed him. "Well, let's begin now," he said. "What is it you want?"

He felt the crudity of his question and winced inwardly. But . . . the thing was said. He would follow through in that tone, then. He tightened his features and leaned back in his chair, his eyes deliberately on the face of his host. He had embarrassed Ware. He could sense that through the man's poise. His poise was only a stall. Well and good. There was nothing for him, Basine, to be embarrassed about.

He felt elated after all with the way he had handled the thing.

"I want to talk to you about a rather delicate matter," Ware began. Basine nodded. He held the trumps. He had only to sit back and this traction baron would begin to mumble, his celebrated poise would begin to disintegrate.

"I'll be as direct as you, Judge," he continued. "I see that you don't like beating around the bush. Neither do I. But I didn't know. As I said, the thing is a rather delicate matter and I want you to take my word for it, that whatever you say in way of reply will in no way change my opinion of you. It's a thing to be said and then forgotten, if necessary, by both of us. Do you agree?

Basine nodded.

"It's about the Hill case," Ware lowered his voice.

"The Hill case?" Basine stared.

"On your calendar, Judge. The violinst suing for $50,000. Hurt by falling off a street car. I thought you knew the case."

"I remember it now, Mr. Ware."

"Well, the man hasn't a case at all. But it's a jury trial and, of course, juries sometimes think out things in an odd way. Now what I'm getting at is this. This particular suit doesn't disturb us much. But the anti-traction press is going to give it a great deal of publicity. And what we're interested in is the effect of the suit. You understand? The town is full of cranks and schemers always trying to get rich by suing some big utility corporation. And if this man Hill wins his case, why it'll mean another hundred cases all as preposterous as his on our hands. Do you follow me?

Basine nodded.

"I told you it was a rather delicate subject," Ware smiled. "And I would never have thought of broaching it if I wasn't sure you would look at it in the light it's offered, you understand? I don't mean I'm asking a judge to do anything outside the facts or to go out of his way to hand us anything. That's dishonest and absurd. The thing is, as you'll see for yourself when the case starts, that this man Hill is an impostor trying to hold us up. We'll prove that to your entire satisfaction. What I'm getting at is that there's the jury and you know the attitude of juries these days toward corporations. They hold against us regardless of evidence. Now what I'm after is to see we get a fair trial and it lies in your province to help us."

Basine leaned forward and spoke with difficulty. His anger had grown in him.

"What is it you want me to do?" he asked.

Ware smiled disarmingly.

"Nothing at all, Judge, that you wouldn't have done of your own volition. I want you, if you are convinced such a course is a just one, to take the case from the jury and throw it out of court. Now, wait a minute. I see you're angry and, as I said, the matter in a way is rather delicate to talk about. But come, I'll say frankly, I'm interested in you. We need men like you. Quick, intelligent and able to see their way. The progress of the city depends upon such men. You know Jennings?"

"Your attorney."

"Yes, in full charge of our legal department. There's another case for you of an intelligent, quick-witted man, scrupulously honest but not an ass. Six

years ago Jennings was a judge on the municipal bench. Wasted . . . utterly wasted . . . today—"

Basine interrupted, his voice harshened.

"An analogy. I see. Thanks."

He stood up. Ware reached out his hand.

"I don't think you quite understand me," he murmured.

"Perfectly," Basine answered. "And I've given my word that whatever I understood would be forgotten.'"

Words welled into Basine's mind. An almost uncontrollable impulse to confound his host with a violent denunciation struggled in him. He would tell this traction baron what manner of man he, Basine, was. And what the dignity of his position as judge was. He would throw the bribe back into the man's teeth. He would declaim. Virtue. Outrage. Creatures who sought to use their power to influence justice. Who thought themselves able to drag men of honor to their level by the promise of favors.

Basine remained silent. His eyes, grown lustrous, stared at Ware. Careful, he must be careful not to protest too violently. That would sound as if he were uncertain. No protest at all. A contemptuous silence. That was more effective. The sort of thing Ware would understand, too. And remember. With a deep breath that sent a tremor through his body, he nodded.

"Good day," he said and turning his back abruptly, walked out of the club. He frowned at the unctuous bell boys and doorman.

Still raining. Basine walked swiftly, unaware of destination. His mind was filled with emotions. Indignation grew in him. Ware had offered a bribe.

There was something in the thing that slowly infuriated him. It was an affront, an attempt at domination. The man had said, "I'm better than you. I can bribe you to do what I want." His spirit revolted. So that was the way to power, eh? Listening to reason when the big wigs spoke? Well, they could go on speaking till doomsday. But they couldn't talk to him like that . . . and get away with it.

The anger slipped from him. He had refused. An elation halted him. He was an honest man! The fact surprised him. He stared with pride at the street. The street held an honest man, a man able to say "no" to temptation.

A tardy appreciation of his righteousness overpowered him. He had something inside him now like a new strength. He could look at men anywhere, anytime, and let his eyes tell them who he was and what sort of man he was. Because he was sure of it himself. He was an honest man, and sure of it.

It was not only inside him, this certainty, but he felt it like a mantle over his shoulders. He walked on with a vigorous step. An unshaven face paused before him and a beggar mumbled for a coin. Basine stopped full. He stopped with deliberation and stared at the unshaven face, at the shifty eyes and dirty linen. The beggar repeated his furtive mumble.

"No," Basine answered clearly. His voice was sharp. The man appeared to wince. He slid away in the rain, his head down.

Basine walked on with an increased elation. He had never been able to do that before, say "no" decisively to a beggar. He had usually said "no", but hurriedly, furtively. That was because he was uncertain of himself. Now he could say "no" or "yes"

to anyone with decision. He had refused a bribe and was an honest man and did not have to concern himself with what others might think of what he said, because of this conviction in him and because of this mantle in which he was wrapped.

He walked in the direction of the County Building. The rain felt fresh. It was a moral rain, a virtuous comrade.

The incident in the club had, in fact, given Basine a character. He had been unaware of his motives from the moment a sense of impending events had come to him in the traction official's automobile. He had, when the bribe came, acted as if following a life-long code of ethics. Yet he had surprised himself. His anger, his violent emotion of righteousness had been inexplicable to him. He had never felt anything like that before.

Basine, in the car, had become aware vaguely of what awaited him. He had recalled and repressed the recollection instantly, the Hill case pending trial before him. And under the surface of his thought the entire drama of the bribe had enacted itself in advance. Ware would offer him something. Yes, and Ware was a man to know, one who could be of vital use in his climb. If Ware asked him to do something it would be wise to do it. He had been eager for the interview and a part of his eagerness had been a desire to grant the traction baron the favor he was going to ask.

But the incident had come during a curious crisis in Basine's life, a crisis that had piled up since his youth. A consciousness had been growing in him of his duplicity. He had been aware of it, but in a different way, during his youth and the early years of

his marriage. It had not made him uncomfortable then. He had been able to lie with a clear conscience. Ruses by which he established himself in the eyes of others, not as he was but as he desired them to think him, had seemed to him then the product of a practical, superior nature.

Slowly, however, his poise in the face of his own duplicities had begun to crumble. He had begun to feel himself filled with the uncertainties of a man forced to conceal too many things from himself. Fitting his hypocricies and lies into worthy necessities had become too complex a business, demanding too much of his energies.

The inner situation in which Basine found himself as he matured had in no way changed his nature. He had gone ahead as always, stumbling finally into a climax of deceits in his relation with the young woman he had hired as his secretary.

In the five months she had worked for him he had been in love with her but had managed to withhold the fact from both of them. He had invented exhaustless explanations for his interest in her, for his desire to be near her, for the increased aversion that had grown in him toward Henrietta and his home.

The crisis had accumulated and reached a head during the services in the Gilchrist home. Here his pent-up self-repugnance, his growing impulse to expurgate the duplicities of his life, had found a minor outlet in the sudden religious faith that had possessed him after his half-hour of doubts. Ware's bribe had come opportunely. Basine's inexplicable anger on sensing the impending bribe, had been his self answer to the eager desire to comply that had struggled to assert itself in him.

And when the man had begun the actual words that meant bribe, he had seized on the situation as a vindication. Opportunity to rehabilitate himself, to wipe out with a single gesture the clutter of dishonesties which were beginning to inconvenience him. He had embraced it and emerged from the club a man, remade. No longer an inwardly shifty Basine able to rise to righteousness only by avoiding his memories. But a Basine with a platform inside him on which he might stand fearlessly. The platform—I am honest. I refused a bribe—had erected itself over the complex memories of himself. They were obliterated now.

He entered his chambers with a serious happiness in his heart. A miracle had happened and he had been given absolution—by himself.

16

Ruth Davis was at her desk. She looked up eagerly as he entered. Basine, hanging up his coat and hat, felt a businesslike desire to explain matters to her. He was an honest man, done with subterfuges.

He would explain to her that it was no longer possible for her to continue in his employ. Use correct but kindly words. He was an honest man. He wanted to impress himself and everybody else with this fact. Even Ruth. He had no thought of impressing it on Henrietta. Henrietta would only be surprised to hear he was an honest man. Because she had always believed it anyway.

But he would like to tell Ruth, because it would raise her opinion of him; fill her with a great pride. A sad pride, of course, since it meant their separation. But she would go away loving him even more because of his honesty that had put an end to his love for her.

The course, however, was impossible. It involved a ludicrous situation. Because he had never said he loved her and she had been as silent as he. And so telling her all these very fine things would make it necessary for him to say first, "I have loved you." And then to add, "But I don't love you any more. I can't."

It was two o'clock. Time for the Judge to take his place on the bench. Basine arose from behind his table with a sense of anti-climax. Nothing had happened. He was going back to his place on the bench again. Poor Gilchrist lay hidden forever and Ware had tried to bribe him and he had proven himself a man of astounding integrity. And he had overcome a growing infatuation for Ruth Davis. Yet nothing had happened.

"Shall I retype the Friday speech, Judge?" Ruth inquired as he hesitated before her desk. He looked at her as if it were difficult to focus his attention on her. He was preoccupied. A man of many preoccupations who found it hard to notice little things around him.

"Oh yes, the speech," he agreed. "Type it. And if there are any mistakes change them to suit yourself."

He walked out of chambers. Ruth turned to her typewriter and prepared to set to work. But as the door closed behind Basine she stopped. She removed a small mirror from a drawer and studied her face in it. She leaned back in her seat and sighed. She felt too restless to work.

With her white brows frowning, she sat looking at the keys of her machine. A miserable restlessness, this was, that never went away. At night she lay

awake in the room she had chosen since becoming financially independent of her family. And a loneliness gnawed in her heart. It was because she loved him.

"Yes, I love him," she repeated to the keys of her machine.

He was not like other men. There was something intimidating about him. He had never spoken to her in a friendly tone. His eyes had never become intimate.

During the five months she had been his secretary he had kept aloof. A strange, unbending man consumed with ambition. His ambition was an awesome thing. There was a directness to it. He worked day and night, always planning for something. His engagements crowded each other. She hardly knew the man. She knew only an ambition that kept pushing tirelessly forward.

There had been no talk between them except business talk. And yet, somehow he had given himself to her. Despite his aloofness and the sternness of his manner, she had felt herself coming close to him, closer than to anybody else she had ever known. And men were no exciting novelty to her. They had held her hand and fumbled around with ambiguous words. They talked art, politics, women, not because they were interested in these things but because they wanted you to be interested in what they thought of them. She had kept her virginity without difficulty. The half-world of art and jobs enthused her. But it did not stampede. A practical side of her remained dubious about the groping ones she met in the studios. It was hard to pick out the real ones from the fourflushers. She had discovered this. Be-

cause the real ones didn't know they were real. Any more than the fourflushers knew they were spurious. They all gabbled and wrote, painted and gabbled, and there was no difference to them.

About the men she had noticed one thing. Their egoism was the egoism of ideas. They were better than others, they thought, because of the ideas in their heads. They were excitedly snobbish about these ideas as people are snobbish about clothes. But they weren't better than others because they were they. They were always leaning on things to make them feel superior. Radicalism was a series of ideas that they picked up because they felt a superior intellectualism in them.

Ruth had started thinking in this direction after listening to Levine, Doris' friend. She had felt something of the sort before. But Levine, with his almost oily pessimism, who talked always as if he were selling something, had made it clear.

"The women who go in for revolt," Levine had said, "Hm, that's another story. They're not interested in egoism. Because as yet there isn't a highly developed caste system among women. They still kind of herd together as a sex and they try to impress each other only with their superior artificialities—as to who has the most doting husband, the nicest times, the most accomplished servants.

"But men—there you have something else, don't you think? And the men we know—the hangers-on around here, comical, eh? You can almost see them bargain hunting for ideas. They don't stand up on their own feet and let out yaps. They keep crawling inside of new ideas. They keep using ideas as megaphones to proclaim their own superiorities. Little

men playing hide and seek inside of big ideas. Using ideas about art and life as kids use pumpkin heads on Hallowe'en. To frighten and impress the neighbors. Another simile—borrowed finery, eh? Ah, they're all fools. It's hard to be much interested in people unless you're a poet. If you're a poet then what you do is ignore people and go down like a deep-sea diver to the bottoms of life. Down there it's interesting. Yes, growths like on the ocean floor."

As a contrast to these men, gabbling in her ear and fumbling with her hands, Basine had interested her at once. At first she had accepted the way he ignored her as a natural attitude. Later, he would become friendly and she looked forward to his friendship. It would be interesting to know what an egoist like Basine thought about things. His ideas were obviously rather stupid, but then—there was something else. Strength, determination. He wasn't like the intellectuals, continuily losing themselves in new ideas and parading around like kids in their big brothers' pants. She disliked that kind of men. The longer you knew them the more unreal they became. Until finally, when you knew them through and through it was like knowing an inferior edition of an encyclopedia through and through. Everything was inside but it made no sense. It had no direction. A jumble of ideas and informations—but they formed no plot, no man. They weren't really egoists—the intellectuals. Men like Basine were.

But his aloofness seemd to increase with time. There had been no natural evolution of friendship. She thought then, "He acts artificially toward me. It's because he doesn't want anything to sidetrack him. Not even friendships. He isn't quite human.

He's like a machine that's wound up. And he must run till he breaks down."

This image of Basine fascinated her. A man without heart, a cool will feeling its way tirelessly toward power, a thirst for power that increased rather than stated itself with success. When he'd been elected judge, he had surprised her by asking, "Would you like to come along with me to the County Building? The office doesn't include a secretary, but I need one on my own account."

During the months she had gained an almost embarrassing insight into the activities engulfing Basine. The man himself remained hidden, non-existent. But the world in which he had obliterated himself became vividly outlined for her. The intrigues, counter intrigues, the complexities of his climb, these were open secrets to her. He seemed shameless about them. Often when she watched him furtively as he wrote out political speeches should would think, "Is there a man there?"

It seemed to her there was not. Only an ambition tirelessly at work. An ambition with a keen, nervous face, sharp eyes, thin hands and an eloquent voice. But something more. A man who didn't hide inside ideas but who remained outside them, giving himself to nothing except his consuming desire to utilize ideas for his own end. He remained outside manipulating. He manipulated life. All for what?

Fascinated, she fell in love. When he came in where she was, her heart jumped. When he talked to her, something contracted in her throat, and frightened her. She had her day dreams. As the spring opened sunny mornings over the streets, she would sit gazing out of the tall windows and think

of Basine. Her thoughts took an odd turn. They built up scenes in which Basine lay defeated. Accidents had maimed him. Political reversals had taken the heart out of him. He was ruined, poor, without employment. She pictured such situations with relish. In them she appeared as an understanding one. She would fancy herself coming to him and shaking her head sadly and saying, "Poor man. I'm so sorry. But you see . . . you see where it all led? to this."

And she would fancy him smiling back with a romantic tiredness and reaching for her hand and answering as if he were an actor with a speech:

"Yes, my dear? I've been wrong. Ambition is wrong. I'm ruined. And it is only proof that I was wrong."

And then, in her fancies, he would look at her tenderly and raising her hand to his lips murmur, "Forgive me, Ruth."

The door of the chambers opened and Ruth looked up, startled. Paul Schroder strode in. He looked jaunty. She smiled. He was one of Basine's friends, and she liked him for that. He had been of the hard-working loyal ones during Basine's campaign.

"Oh, nothing in particular," he said. "Thought I'd just drop in for a smoke. How's his Honor, these days?"

"He's very fine," Ruth answered. Schroder shook his head.

"I'm afraid he's drying up," he grinned. "That's the trouble with men of his type. Get their noses down to a grindstone and never have time to look up."

Ruth blushed. That didn't sound like a loyal

speech. She saw Schroder smiling broadly at her.

"You're quite a champion of his," he was saying. "Well, well. Maybe his Honor isn't as slow as I've been giving him credit for being."

From anyone else this would have been offensive, she thought. But there was something pleasing in the accusation. She hesitated and then returned his smile.

"You know as well as I, what kind of a man Judge Basine is," she answered. "He's the kind every woman respects at first sight."

"Loves, you mean," said Schroder.

"Oh no, I don't think a woman could really love Mr. Basine," she smiled. "He's too much wrapped up in himself."

"Well, I don't know then," said Schroder, "his wife puts up a pretty good bluff then."

Ruth's smile left her.

"Oh," she said, "of course."

Schroder laughed.

"Well, well," he went on, "so you'd forgotten he had a wife. That's a sweet kettle of fish. Such memory lapses are dangerous. Watch your step, young lady. Look out."

He stood up and approached her and wagged a finger mockingly. In a way Schroder annoyed her. He always made her feel juvenile. She could never use any of her sophisticated phrases on him. Because he laughed too loudly and if you retorted cleverly he always guffawed as if he had trapped you into having to be clever. His manner always seemed to say, "You can't put it over me. I know. I know. . ."

Ruth turned with relief at the sound of a door opening. Basine. This was one of his habits, to

appear suddenly and for no reason at all and walk up and down the large room as if immersed in grave thought. She had often wondered why he did this. She thought it was because the work on the bench made him too nervous or because there were so many things weighing on his mind that he needed a few minutes now and then to straighten himself out.

But while thinking this she had always felt that his sudden appearances had something to do with her. It was perhaps only a part of her vanity, she mused. but she always had this impression—that despite his indifference and sternness he was curiously attentive. No matter how busy he was he never absented himself long. He was always returning and walking up and down. It was odd, but she felt at times that he walked up and down for her, to be near her.

"Hello Paul," Basine's eyes slanted up at him, his head slightly lowered. A pose which gave him a pugnaciously concentrated air such as a schoolmaster looking over the top of his glasses at an erring pupil might achieve. "What do you want?" A disconcerting directness he reserved for the embarrassment of his friends. He asked straightforward questions, point-blank questions. His questions always had the air of troops unafraid, wheeling in manœuver to face the enemy.

"Nothing much, Judge. But your office is kind of restful."

Schroder rolled a kittenish eye toward Ruth.

"Oh!" Basine stiffened. "Hm."

Schroder winked at the girl. He came forward, and added, "All the comforts of home, eh?" And dropped into a chair beside her.

He had the faculty of boyishness, a talent for inti-

macies. His trick was a conscious thrust beneath the guard of women. He chose to ignore the delicate fol de rols of pursuit, the pretense of formality. He refused to recognize the barriers of dignity, strangeness, social poise—but stepped through them with an easy laugh as if perfectly aware of what lay beyond, and seated himself beside his quarry in the guise of a mischievous boy asking to be congratulated for his boldness.

Women succumbed to this gesture, disarmed by its frankness, its pretense to innocent juvenility. In this manner Schroder achieved within an hour intimacies which came to other men only after months of laborious toil. He threw a noise of laughter over the bantering innuendoes of his talk, disguising boldness in its own obviousness. His sallies seemed to say, "You have nothing to fear from us since we are not secretive. We are cards on the table."

Women thought of him, "He's lots of fun. You don't have to pretend with him. You can play and talk without feeling he's laying traps for you."

But despite the straightforwardness of the man they soon located the overtone in his conversation. It lay in his eyes. His eyes never gave themselves to his laughter. They seemed to watch avidly from behind something. It was as if they were independent of his characterization as a frankly mischievous overgrown boy. They were able to ask amazingly indecent questions in the midst of his frankest outbursts. Women invariably grew embarrassed under their stare. There was no defense against the inquisitive impudence with which they announced the male's concentration. Their gleam was like an unmistakable whisper—an invitation.

Basine admired the man. But he remained oblivious to this side of him. Schroder's female conquests had never interested the Judge. He had heard of them and forgotten immediately. Now, however, memories returned. Schroder was an unscrupulous animal. Basine looked at him with a hopeless misgiving.

He noticed as Schroder and Ruth talked that he seemed on far more intimate terms with her than he. There was an *esprit* between the two as if they were comrades of long standing. His friend's familiarity was a shock—as if he had caught him undressed, unexpectedly. Basine listened to his talk with an aloof frown, as if he were unable to focus his attention on the scene. He was thinking of something else—faraway things, vast preoccupations.

"Loafing is an art. Don't you think so, Ruth?"

"I've never had time to find out."

"Hm. I'm teacher. Want me to be teacher?"

"Why yes, if you have time in your loafing."

"Time for you always, my dear." A contemplative stare at the girl. "What would you say, Judge, if I fall in love with your charming secretary." He laughed. Basine cleared his throat. He felt miserably out of this sort of thing. He was shocked to hear Ruth giggle.

"Yes sir," Schroder continued. "And what are you doing this evening?"

"Nothing, Mr. Schroder."

"Well, why waste time? How about dinner and a show?"

"Really?" She glanced at Basine as if to declare him in on this give and take. He was preoccupied,

hardly observing what was happening. She pouted.

"Cross my heart," said Schroder.

"Thanks very much. A very generous, if general invitation."

"Discovered!" Schroder laughed. "All right then. Six o'clock at the Auditorium. Woman's entrance. I'll wear a red rose in my ear. Can't miss me."

Ruth nodded.

"There you are, George," Schroder cried. "All done in a minute. And tomorrow we'll be in love with each other. What'll you marry us for, your Honor? Remember I helped elect you." A boisterous laugh that seemed to mock the boastfulness and prophecies of the man and say of itself, "I'm joshing all of you including me" . . .

Basine left them. His heart was heavy, uncomfortable. He sat on the bench frowning at the scene. Eager lawyers whispering; a woman in a green hat holding a handkerchief to her eyes; a bald-headed man on the other side of the long mahogany table; faces for a background. A divorce case. The woman weeping was a wife. The bald-headed one with the air of a board of directors' meeting about him ogled his accusers with dignity. He was a husband. The jury sat dolorously inattentive in the box. A witness was testifying.

Other people's troubles. An interminable jawing back and forth—lawyers, defendants, witnesses and more lawyers. Basine frowned. Other people's troubles—and he had his own. This thing before him was an intrusion. At best he had no sympathy for the interminable jawing that went on under his eyes. He had grown passionately interested in what he called the people. But when he thought of the

people he thought of them as a force, a group, an army standing with faces raised repeating certain slogans—a vision that Doris had bequeathed him. The interminable jawing, weeping, accusation and denial before him from day to day had nothing to do with the people. About these individuals he was cynical. And more, he was not interested.

The witness was testifying. The intimidating air of the judge seemed to confuse her. Her confusion irritated Basine. He turned indignantly and faced her with a bullying frown.

"What is it you're trying to say, madam? Did you see this man beat her?"

"Yes, your honor . . . I . . . I . . . that is . . . "

Basine controlled his temper and grimaced humorously at the jurors whose faces at once lighted with an appreciative smile. A fearless man, Judge Basine, who couldn't tolerate the mumble mumble of legal technicalities and who struck at the roots of things when he took charge of a witness.

. . . They were in the room behind him. Alone. An intolerable thought. But, impossible to keep his thought away. His imagination like a merciless flagellate, belabored him with fancies. Paul would teach her. Lean over and kiss her. And she would kiss in return and whisper, "Paul . . . " He was unmarried and good looking. Perhaps she was heartbroken, too. He, Basine, had never spoken despite the light he had recognized of late in her eyes. She was in love with him and filled with despair because her love was useless. So now she would turn to Schroder in desperation. She would try to forget him, Basine. It was logical. Women forgot hurts in that way—by giving themselves to someone else.

The heaviness grew unbearable. Another man was touching Ruth. This was unbearable. He couldn't stand it. But why? What difference? He couldn't . . . She was so beautiful. Another man's hands were desecration.

A weakness came to him. His heart darkened. What if she did, with Schroder? They were probably kissing now. It had been hard to imagine himself kissing her. To him she somehow seemed aloof, beyond possession. But it was easy to imagine Schroder. Men and women put their arms around each other and that was an end to aloofness.

He made an effort to pull himself together. Voices were droning around him—other people's troubles. Faces thrust themselves tactlessly at his eyes. He grew nauseated. He had never felt like this before. As if he must do something despite his will. His will said, "Sit there. Don't move. It's none of your business." But this other thing was pulling him out of his seat and moving his body for him.

He clenched his teeth and muttered to himself, "She's no good. Wasting my time on her!"

"That will be all for today," Basine muttered. He placed his hand wearily over his forehead. This would make them think he was ill. His clerk came forward.

"Anything wrong, Judge?" he asked with concern.

Basine shook his head with Spartan indifference to the mythical disease consuming him.

"No," he said, belying his answer in its tone, "court is adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow."

He nodded briefly at the faces. The solicitous regard in the eyes of attorneys and jurors reassured him. He was ill, very ill—that was it. Of course,

that was it. The eyes of the attorneys and jurors said, "You are working too hard. You must be careful of a nervous breakdown. In your prime too. Be careful."

He walked off the bench, his step unsteady. He was acting. But the fact that his step was not authenticly unsteady was an accident—and illogical. He felt it logical to walk unsteadily since everyone thought him ill and on the verge of a breakdown.

"You'd better go home, Judge."

Basine nodded gratefully to his clerk. He opened the door to his chambers. The sight of Schroder bewildered him. Schroder was still there. He had his hat in his hand, though. Basine stared at his friend. His heart contracted and his breath fluttered in his throat.

"What's wrong, George?"

"Nothing. Headache. Knocked off for the day."

Words were hard to speak. His eyes turned to Ruth. She was watching him. Frightenedly, he thought. Had she done something? Kissed? They looked guilty. He tried to find answers to the questions by staring at her. Was she the same as she had been? Or had she given her lips? A vital question. They were going out tonight together. Basine controlled himself. He sat down at his desk and ran his hand wearily over his head.

"Well, so long," Schroder spoke. "Hope you feel better, George." A pause. "See you later, Ruth."

See her later! They had no sympathy for his illness. They would go out and laugh, hold hands, make love—despite his trouble. He sat brooding over the cruelty of women. "Cruel. No finer feelings," he mumbled to himself.

They were alone. Was he ill? What was it that had lifted him off the bench? Nothing definite. A dark disorder in his mind, a heaviness in his heart that had seemed part of the room. He wanted to moan. Yes, he was sick.

"Can I do anything, Judge?"

He hated her. Her voice with its hypocritical concern. As if she cared for him. After what had happened between her and Schroder . . . see you later . . . and he called her Ruth.

"No, Miss Davis."

This was unbearable. He would insult her. There was relief in insulting her, making her suffer for something, too. But she might go away if he did. He couldn't go on with his work any more. Work was impossible. A disease was active in him sending out dark clouds that choked his thought and swelled his heart with pain. She might leave for good. Then what could he do? Nothing. But why all this make-believe? He would tell her he loved her. Simple. That would drain him of his pain. He stood up and paced. She was at her desk, he noticed, eyes large and excited.

But he could do nothing, say nothing. He was impotent. Good God! he must. How? No way he could think of. The thing was smothering him. Before—days and weeks before—he had kept it down. But now it had slid from underneath and was in his head. There was no outlet. He dared not talk.

No thoughts were in his mind. Henrietta, his children, home, morality, marriage, none of these was in his mind. But there was a restriction, a wall he could not pass. There were things holding him with

merciless hands. They gripped at his body and thrust themselves like gags into his mouth.

She had risen and was standing near the window. If he kept to his pacing he must come near her. It was her fault. He was just pacing. She was in his path. If he walked straight to the end of the room she would be in his path. Why should he turn out for her?

He paused beside her. He must say nothing. It was talk that was impossible. He stood looking at her until his eyes grew bewildered. There was a moment in which he seemed to vanish from himself, as if he had stepped bodily out of himself. His thought paralyzed with a curious terror, he saw nothing. The moment of unconsciousness passed and he was still alive and still on his feet. His voice lay under control in his throat and the memory of his name sat like a perpetual visitor in his thought.

But there was a change. A miraculous thing had happened. He was no longer Basine. He was a stranger in a strange world. He was holding her in his arms. An impossible sensation was in him. This was something he couldn't believe. He wanted to look at himself. He had his arms around her. But there was no woman in the circle of his arms. He was holding something that let his delirium escape. Torments were emptying themselves in the embrace. The miseries that had accumulated under the surface of his months of resistance, were leaving him, flying from him. His heart was growing unbearably light.

"Oh!" he murmured. Her arms had tightened and he saw her eyes approach him. They were rapturous.

She was warm, intimate, close to him. Her lips,

still piquantly strange, were offering themselves. She was unlike everything he knew. A startling vigor, as if he had been changed into a rampaging giant, swept him as they kissed. He was great, strong. He could walk over the heads of the world. He had no need for further embrace. He stepped away, his face radiant.

Ruth looked at him in confusion. This was a new Basine. He frightened. The mask was gone, the frown of preoccupation. She grew dizzy in the light of his eyes. He was a stranger. What should she call him? But he was talking to her in a voice that he seemed to have kept secret . . . "I love you, Ruth. I love you."

He laughed. She smiled uncertainly and felt that her face looked awkward. She could see the lines of her cheeks bulging as she lowered her eyes. This confused her and made her feel stiff. There had been something of this sort a few minutes ago in Paul Schroder when he had tried to take her hand. But now the thing she had noted calmly in Schroder seemed a puny imitation. Here it was real. He was laughing, softly, joyously. He was like a boy. Her heart filled with panic. She put her arms quickly around his neck and pressed herself close to him. The panic went out of her deliciously.

"George, I love you. I'm so happy."

They sat looking at each other, an excited smile in Basine's eyes. His body was tingling. A new sense had come. It lived in his fingers. He was holding her hand. His fingers were charged with an amazing energy. They seemed to have become part of a different person. He was able to enjoy the ecstasy that confused his fingers as if it were an external emotion.

The rest of him was clear, almost tranquil.

"Well," he said. It was still hard to talk. He was aware of incongruities. He was not Basine talking, not the new Basine, not the one whose fingers danced and throbbed. His voice belonged to other Basines —other characterizations whose awkward ghosts fluttered nervously in his thought. He would discuss this phenomenon. It was easy, after all. Be honest. She was one with whom he could be astonishingly honest. They were isolated. The world was a futility. There was an end to make-believe now. It was all honest, tranquil, joyous. He began again:

"Well, isn't it strange. I can hardly talk to you. I'm not used to us yet. This way. I've loved you since I first saw you. But I've told so many lies about that to both of us. . . " He paused to smile at her as if asking her not to believe him a liar, or if she must —a liar in a high cause—"that the things I want to say now seem like . . . like the contradictions of something. Of old lies . . . in a way."

She nodded.

"Oh, I know," she whispered. A preposterous admiration of her intelligence overcame him. Of course she understood! It was unnecessary to talk to her. She had kissed and embraced him. She had felt the same things he had. And now, their thoughts were alike. They were like one person, having shared something that filled them. It was unnecessary to talk. Because if he remained silent she knew he was thinking of her. A charming sense of comradeship came to him.

"I feel," he said, "as if we were too intimate for words."

She nodded again and smiled.

"We'll make a holiday," he added. "Come, we'll go for a drive."

They embraced. This time he thought of Henrietta. Ruth was different from his wife. Her shoulder blades felt different under his fingers. It was impossible to think they were both women. His arms around Henrietta meant nothing. His arms around Ruth now—he closed his eyes in order to closet himself with indefinable sensations.

They emerged from the traffic of the loop. Basine at the wheel of his newly purchased roadster dropped a hand on hers.

"I feel better like this," he said.

"Isn't it wonderful," she whispered.

He would have liked to tell her they were floating over buildings. But he kept silent. Words were still self-conscious interlopers. The houses moved away. A spring wind was in their faces. They were silent. The pavements ended. Basine brought the car to a stop.

"I don't know what to do," he said. "I'm so happy."

He placed his arms around her. The touch of her body through his clothes was a reminder of something. He gave it no words. They sat embraced, their faces together and an unspoken laugh in their hearts. The sun was high overhead. Basine tried to remember himself . . . Henrietta, his home, his position. Ah, banalities. He was proud. He was above remorse, regret; above himself. There was nothing in the world as beautiful as the moment he commanded.

Ruth leaned avidly against him as if seeking refuge in his arms. He sat thinking. "It is right. Everything right. I've done nothing. No compromise.

Nothing. I'm happy. There's nothing to frighten me."

He felt released.

17

Summer lay like a Mandarin coat over the city. It was June. Warm, sun-awninged streets glistened with ornamental colors. Women in gaudy fabrics, men in violent hat bands, straws, panamas, striped shirts, sun parasols like huge discs of confetti, freshly painted red and green street cars, pastel tinted automobiles—all these tumbled like a swarm of sprightly incoherent adjectives along the foot of the buildings.

The store windows like deaf and dumb hawkers grimaced at the crowds. Ice creams, silks, swimming suits, and sport paraphernalia; jaunty frocks, white trousers, candies, festive haberdashery, drugs, leather goods, wicker furniture and assortments of lingerie like the symbols of fastidious sins—all these grimaced behind plate glass.

The city was in bloom. People, perspiring and lightly dressed, sauntered by the plate glass orchards. Summer filled the city with reminiscent smells. Sky, water, grass scampered like merry ghosts through the carnival of the shopping center. Warm, sun-awninged streets; ornamental men and women—summer spread itself through the crowds, warmed the bargain hunters, loiterers, clerks, stenographers, business men and housewives into a half sleep.

They peered lazily at each other. Their mysterious preoccupations seemed to have subsided. The sun made holiday in the streets and the high, fluttering windows showered endless tiny suns on the air.

The morning held the unreal soul of some forgotten picnic.

Ten o'clock. Fanny Gilchrist turned with an inward sigh and walked out of the crowded business street. This was LaSalle street and, concealed in the buildings around her, were people who knew her and might see her. Accidentally bump into her.

The crowds grew thinner and less familiar types of faces drifted by. This was better. She wasn't exactly afraid. But what if someone did bump into her accidentally? Then she would have to say where she was going and, if she lied, perhaps they would insist upon coming along and discover it. But that was foolishness. One never met people in streets like that.

Men looked at her with casual interest, with insignificant enthusiasm, as she walked by them. A bright-haired, shining-eyed young woman with a body undulating softly under a grey and green trimmed dress; she seemed to light up the dingy pavements. Other women passed lighting them up also. Each new female illuminant was welcomed with thankful, greedy eyes.

Her red sailor jauntily tilted and the silken gleam of her face were like part of a luscious mask. She was a woman hurrying somewhere and men, bored with other women, looked at her enthusiastically. She was one of the many enigmatic ones, one of the many gaudy colored masks behind which sex paraded its mystery through the sun-awninged streets. Eyes ennuied with the memory of sex lighted eagerly in the presence of its masks. The flash of ankles and the swell of thighs under pretty fabrics were diversions even for moralists.

Schroder waiting patiently on a street corner watched the warm crowd. She wouldn't come. Yes, she would. Well, another five minutes would tell.

He saw her and his excitement changed. A leisurely smile came to his face. His body relaxed. He was a connoisseur in rendezvous and his enjoyment of the moment which witnessed her approach was deliberate. Women in themselves did not interest him so much. Their bodies—pleasant, yes. But after all—a finale. And one does not applaud finales.

But now, watching her lithe figure hurrying toward him was a diversion to be sipped at, contemplated in all its emotional detail, and enjoyed. Later it would be this moment he remembered, if he remembered anything—which was uncertain. For his memories which had in his younger days glistened in his thought like a mosaic of eroticism, had of late blurred to a monotone. He could remember women, liaisons, passion phrases and great enthusiasms but, curiously, they seemed all identical. To recall how one woman had sighed in his arms was to recall the whole pack of them. As if the souls of his paramours and the manner of their surrenders were contained completely in the recollection of any one detail.

But despite his ennui, this moment of approach still delighted him. The woman hurrying to his side was not yet a woman. She was still a mystery whose inevitable and never varying sensualism was masked for a final instant behind unfamiliar fabrics. There was a piquant unreality, a diverting strangeness, as she smiled at him. She was somebody he did not know. He was authentically bored with women. But for the moment it was not a woman approaching—rather a

new color of cloth, a new combination of dress, a new species of social poise and gesture were presenting themselves for ravishment. In these unfamiliar surfaces lay a tenuous mystery as if it were these externals he was about to embrace. And in the contemplation of this mystery, his interest revived itself. He sighed. It was a mystery which would vanish shortly.

"Hello, dearest."

He greeted her softly, with regret. A quixotic impulse to turn and walk away before she spoke had died in him.

Fanny was staring expectantly. He was familiar with the expression. Not in her, but in others. This took away its charms. Married women were nearly all alike. Full of distressing short cuts, with an irritating and incongruous professionalism behind their bewilderment. What dolts husbands must be to blunt women like that.

As he took her hand and felt her fingers clutch excitedly around his palm he remembered in an instant the predecessors of her type. Full of distressing short cuts. When they gave their hands they withheld nothing. They denuded themselves with a look, with a handclasp. And the subtlety of skirmishing seemed entirely foreign to them. When they embraced it was with an appalling directness. Yes, in intrigue they were all alike—all like precocious children; vague, bewildered children mimicking the precisions of their elders and exclaiming with distressful incongruity:

"Tut, tut. Let's come to the point. Let's get down to brass tacks and stop beating around the bush."

Well, here she was and the scene was on.

"Am I late?"

"No, dearest. I was just a little early so as to enjoy the impatience of waiting for you."

The nuance was lost upon her. Amorous women were a cold audience for technique.

"I'm so upset. Do you mind?"

"Not at all, Fanny. Of course you're upset. But it only adds to your charm."

He had long ago abandoned love-making tactics, sensing that women who came to him were not particularly interested in tender pretenses. They desired flattery, but direct and practical variants. This one was like the others, flushed, eager, frightened and gay. He felt an exhilaration as they walked toward the entrance of the unpretentious hotel around the corner. A sense of conquest. It was nothing to be enjoyed in itself. But if people knew, which they never could, alas, they would be awed by the ease with which he accomplished such things. One, two, three meetings and—here they were again. Paul Schroder entering a hotel with a woman at his side.

"This isn't a bad place," he whispered. "I've already registered. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Johnson. It's better if you know your name, of course."

Fanny stood tremblingly in front of the elevator cage as he walked to the desk. She noticed his carelessness, the unselfconscious way in which he smiled at the clerk and paused to buy some cigars. The fear that had grown in her since she left her home appeared to be reaching a climax. Her knees shivered under her dress and a catch in her throat made breathing difficult.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," she repeated silently to herself, and tried to understand the cause of her trembling. Even if there were consequences

—there was Aubrey. She smiled nervously. It was his fault. He was a fool.

They entered the elevator. A sleepy boy shut the cage door after them. Schroder gripped her arm and his fingers caressed the soft flesh. She turned to him and smiled. She was no longer afraid. A shameless, exultant light kindled in her eyes. She leaned against him with a shiver as the elevator lifted slowly.

* * *

. . . They had decided to check out in time for her to return home for dinner.

"I don't have to go up to the desk with you, do I?" she asked.

Schroder smiled tiredly.

"Oh no," he said, "you wait at the entrance with the property suit case. Then we'll both take a cab and drive a few blocks. I'll get out with the bag and you drive on home. It's simple."

Nevertheless the fear she had experienced in the morning returned as she watched him go to the desk. In another minute it would be all over and everything would be all right. But now—what if someone saw them? Bumped into her accidentally. The lassitude which had filled her when she locked the tumbled hotel room behind her, gave way to a curious panic. Her tired nerves became unhappily alive.

"Why—hello, Mrs. Gilchrist."

She was unable to see the man for an instant. Her mind had darkened. "I mustn't faint," she murmured to herself. She was looking at an unshaven, dissipated face that smiled. As she looked her world seemed to be falling down. Everything gone—ruined. Because a face was smiling. Tom Ramsey.

The man's name popped into her thought.

"Hello," she muttered.

Schroder approached and frowned. He took her arm and led her away. She began to cry in the cab.

"He saw us. He knows. He'll tell everybody. Oh my God! Why did you come up when you saw him? If you'd only realized. Oh, why did I do it? Now everything's ruined. I'm lost."

She wept, knowing the futility of tears. An accident that seemed provokingly unreal and soothingly unimportant—Tom Ramsey. Yet the name was like a guillotine block on which her head lay stretched.

Schroder, annoyed, tried to console her.

"Who was it? Listen, pull yourself together. People always imagine themselves guiltier looking than they are. He probably thought nothing wrong."

"Tom Ramsey. Didn't you see how he looked at me? Oh, God, I'm sick."

"Who is he?"

"He used to be my mother's friend. But he went to the dogs. He's just a tramp now. He isn't a gentleman."

Schroder sighed.

"Oh well," he said, "there's no use worrying. Come, put it out of your head."

"I can't. Oh, I can't. Why did I do it. I'll kill myself if . . . if anything happens. Aubrey will . . . Oh Paul, I feel sick."

He stared glumly at the back of the chauffeur's head. A nuisance. A damned nuisance. His mind played with contrasts. A few hours ago she had been shameless. Now she sat weeping. He thought of her as ungrateful and grew angry.

"I'll step out now," he whispered. "Call me up

tomorrow at the office, will you? Nothing will happen. Please, be calm. It's all imagination."

He halted the cab and stepped out with the suitcase. She would feel better, he knew, as soon as he disappeared. She would be able to convince herself then that nothing had happened—that she was coming home from a shopping tour.

"Goodbye. Call me up, dearest."

Fanny sat weeping as the cab moved away. Ramsey had seen her. A misery too heavy for thought brought another burst of tears. She hated Schroder. And herself, too. But most of all the ragged looking, unshaven Ramsey in the lobby. Why had he come at just that moment? If they had left the room ten minutes earlier. It was Paul's fault. He insisted on combing his hair, and reading a story in the newspaper. If he hadn't sent down for the newspaper in the middle of the afternoon. He didn't love her or he wouldn't have thought of sending for it. She had laughed at the time but it was an insult. He was a brute. If he had loved her he wouldn't have wanted to read a newspaper and they wouldn't have met Ramsey. She sat conjuring up dozens of trifling incidents which, had they occurred, would have prevented the fatal meeting with Ramsey.

Then she smiled convulsively through her tears. It was about the story. They had laughed at it in the room. "Judge Basine Launches Vice Quiz. State to Investigate Problem of Immorality Among Women Wage Earners . . ."

"Why girls go wrong . . . why girls go wrong," rumbled through her head now and she laughed hysterically. Oh, that tramp of a Ramsey had spoiled it all. Otherwise it would have been wonderful. And

next week, too. But perhaps he hadn't noticed anything. Of course he hadn't. Paul was right.

She dried her tears and looked into the twilighted streets. She had planned her homecoming days ago. She would be ill, overcome by the heat and excuse herself from the dinner table. A final chill shot through her heart as the cab stopped.

She found herself entering her home with complete poise. It was almost as if nothing had happened. Here were the familiar things of life. Her home, Aubrey, the rows of books, the walnut library table. Nothing had happened. For a moment she was amazed at the complete unconsciousness of the day. Then smiling delightedly at her husband in a chair, a familiar husband in a familiar chair, she removed her hat and approached him.

Leaning over the back of his chair she kissed him tenderly on the cheek. He was her protector. Good old Aubrey, so familiar, so placid and unchanged. If it only hadn't been for Ramsey everything would be so nice now. But anyway, it wasn't so bad. She had been a bit hysterical.

"Where've you been, Fanny?"

She felt no twinge at the question. Instead an enthusiasm for the situation filled her.

"To the matinee," she laughed. "Oh, I saw the nicest show."

She leaned forward and took his hand. Aubrey regarded her with a petulant stare. Despite their years of marriage, she was still an animal, gross and irritating.

"And I'm just starved," she exclaimed. "I was never so hungry in my life."

She laughed, overjoyed at the truth of the statement and hurried upstairs to prepare for dinner.

18

The manuscript had been found in the drawer where William Gilchrist kept his collars. It lay underneath a number of loose collars.

With the death of his father a curious love for the man had come to Aubrey. He remembered from day to day things his father had said, or seemed to say. A sad, elderly man who lived secretly in his thoughts. That was his father.

Like him, Aubrey now had a secret life that he lived only in his thoughts, and this was slowly making him kin to the man who had died. In Aubrey's thoughts dwelt a dramatic, startling figure—a gleaming, hawk-faced thunderer; a lean Isaiah of burning phrases with an eagle-winged soul beating its way toward God. This was Aubrey Gilchrist. Not the Aubrey whom life had mysteriously deformed into an advertising man, but an Aubrey triumphant who had risen above the petty turns of Fate and burst upon a world—a voice crying forth astounding phrases against the evil of man's ways.

The inner characterization in which Aubrey was gradually immersing himself remained a vague though warm generality. He was able to visualize the Thunderer and able to enjoy the results of his genius. In his day dreams he pictured this inner one bringing the world to his feet. Books were being written about him, magazines and newspapers were filled with his praises and interpretations, and men and women everywhere discussed his ascent in awe. He was a

conqueror—a bloodless Napoleon and a martyrless Jesus. A prophet whose genius was lifting men out of the mire.

What the message was which this inner Aubrey was spreading through the world, what the phrases were that ignited the souls of men, were not contained in his imaginings. He approached them from a critical and not creative angle—his fancies presenting him with descriptive self praises. He composed rambling articles in his mind celebrating his triumphs. This inner Aubrey was eloquent, electrifying, unassailable; men and women wept over his writings and repented; cities reared statues to him, and all places sang his glories. The whole thing had begun as a game, deliberately invented to occupy the leisure of his mind. But he had elaborated on it and it had grown almost by itself. Now it preoccupied him to an alarming degree.

The manuscript in his father's collar drawer had given him a shock. He had kept it from his mother, assuring himself that such a course was for the best. It was an odd document for his father to leave behind.

As he sat in his study a week after the funeral reading it for the first time, Aubrey grew frightened. It seemed to him that he was looking at his father—for the first time, that the man who had till now been a half enigmatic figure to him, stood at last in the room, strong and alive. The thing was a primitive type of novel—discoursive, gentle, Rabelaisian. It recounted the mental and physical adventures of an Elizabethan philosopher in a succession of unrelated episodes. There was a caress in the sentences, a simplicity in the narrative that translated itself into cunning realism.

When he had finished the reading, Aubrey stared at his father's portrait hanging over one of the book cases. The reality of the manuscript held him. He felt bewildered. It had for some three hours lifted him out of the present and immersed him in scenes and amid a company of naive ancients, starkly alive. A dormant literary sense awakened in him. The thing was a work of art, as moving, as authentic as Apuleius or Cervantes. But he would put it away. He hid it in a private drawer.

Its memory, however, grew in his mind. During his day at work the thought of the thing his father had written came to haunt him, as if it demanded something. He felt closer to it than he had ever felt to his father. There was something distasteful, though, about the intimacy.

"That was his soul," he would explain over to himself. "He lived that way inside. It was like writing a biography of secret dreams for him. It's strange. We're all like that. Even I. There was something odd in father. Funny we never guessed. It must have been written a paragraph at a time over years and years. It was a sort of diary."

And he would recall excerpts from the book—gentle skepticisms, childish animalisms. But the tone of the thing which he could never put into words was what haunted him most. Over the naive acrobatics of plot and lively preenings of idea, an unwritten smile spread itself, a pensive tolerance that seemed to say, "Yes, yes, life has been. This tale is a curious jest. An epitaph over an empty grave. Yesterday is unreal and today is even less real. Yet here are fancies, the ghosts of sad and happy folk

who never lived. And among these ghosts I once found life . . ."

The idea of publishing the manuscript came to Aubrey one evening when his wife returned from the theater in a curious mood. She was late for dinner and this irritated him. But her manner was even more irritating. She was strident, flushed, gross. Her laugh as they ate made his mother frown, he observed. He said little. When they left the table an indignation toward Fanny had come to him.

He retired to his study. Fanny insisted on following him. She hovered about his chair as he tried to read, caressing him in a curious way, as if he were a child with whom she was amused. It occurred to him that she thought him a failure, that there was something condescending in her manner.

"Oh, leave me alone, please, Fanny."

"Hm! We're peevish. Dear me. Poor old Aubrey's working too hard."

"Please."

"But I want to talk to you. I want to tell you about the matinee."

"I'm not interested, Fanny. You know how I hate vaudeville."

"I love it."

"That's your privilege."

"Don't be sarcastic, Aubrey."

"I'm not. I'm just tired."

"Tired? What have you been doing?"

Despite herself she accented the you. The memory of Schroder and their day together had left her. It persisted, however, as a curious elation. The ambiguity of words exhilarated her. She felt a sense of mastery. She wanted also to be tender toward

Aubrey, to please and charm him. It was necessary to do this in order to disarm him. But he had no suspicions. She was certain of that. Nevertheless it was necesary to make sure he had none. There were many paradoxical things necessary and most curious of them all was the necessity of showing Aubrey that she loved him. Her heart warmed toward him as it hadn't for years. She felt unaccountably grateful to Aubrey. She would have liked to sit at his side whispering love names and caressing his hair.

"Well, for one thing, I've been writing."

He looked at her calmly.

"Writing? You mean books? Why, I didn't know!"

Aubrey smiled, recovering a superiority toward her. But his heart grew heavy almost simultaneously. She had thrown her arms about him and was exclaiming, "Oh, I'm so glad. I'm so glad you're writing again, Aubrey darling. I've wanted you to so much."

He pushed her away slowly. She stood pouting.

"Now I can see where I take a back seat," she sighed. "Yes sir, you won't have time for me at all. But I don't care. As long as you're happy, darling, I'm delighted. I want you to be happy and I know it makes you happy to write."

When she left the room Aubrey remained frowning after her. He would surprise her. He would surprise them all. He would publish the manuscript under his own name. It would create a sensation. It would bring him back in the public eye more glorified than he had been in his literary heyday.

In a few days the idea had grown to obliterating

proportions. For a time he abandoned the contemplation of the inner Aubrey—the gleaming-eyed Thunderer. This other was nearer reality—an Aubrey hymned as a rejuvenated literary figure. But he hesitated. His indecision resulted in a predicament. He had been boasting cautiously of his new work, letting out hints as to its character. There was Cressy, a literary critic and a member of the club where he lunched. He had talked to him about it.

"I'm surprised myself," he explained. "I was rather uncertain whether I could come back. But the rest was evidently just what I needed. The book isn't at all in my old style. More direct, sincere and entirely simple. You'll like it."

Cressy became important in Aubrey's predicament. Cressy was a man whom Aubrey identified as "the more discriminating public." He yearned for the approval of this public. And as his decision to have his father's manuscript printed under his own name grew, Aubrey sought the critic out. It was pleasant to boast to Cressy, to feel oneself part of the superior literary world Cressy inhabited.

Cressy had left the university with the determination to write. He had, however, developed into a scholar, using a knowledge of Greek and Latin to acquire a baggage of classical erudition. For ten years he had been contributing literary essays to magazines and newspapers. In these he wagged his head sorrowfully over the decline of letters. He presented an impregnable front to all new writers. The names of new novelists in the book lists irritated him precisely as the names of new celebrities in the society columns had once irritated Mrs. Basine. He

resented them as intruders and focused a pedantic wrath on them.

In his own mind he pictured himself as being in a continual state of revolt against the inferiority of modern literature. His attacks, however, were entirely a defensive gesture. His literary point of view was inspired by a heroic desire to annihilate contemporary literature. Contemporary books were an insult and a barrier to his egoism. He battled against them. His struggle was the quixotic effort to assert the superiority of his erudition. New novels, new poetries, new philosophies were a conspiracy to minimize him and he went after them with the zeal of one engaged in tracking criminals to their lair.

At forty-five he was a stern-faced man with a greying mustache, heavy glasses behind which gleamed indignant eyes. He was impressive looking. People who never read his fulminations still felt a high regard for his scholarship. He was fearless in the pronunciation of French, Latin and Greek names and invariably functioned as arbiter in all disputes concerning classical quotations and allusions.

His friendship with Aubrey was based chiefly on the certainty he felt that Aubrey was an inferior writer. He was not part of the conspiracy aimed at the minimization of Cressy, the scholar.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that, Aubrey," he congratulated his friend. "Very glad. Writing is a delight few people understand these days."

"I know. And I think you'll be interested particularly, John, because the story is of Eizabethan England. I've modeled the technique on Apuleius and the other later Roman tale-tellers."

"Indeed!" Cressy bristled. "That should be interesting."

"I'd like to have your opinion of it, John. I've always valued what you say, but this time more than ever. Because I feel I've entered your field and you're guarding the fences and all that."

Cressy's face relaxed. Quite right. His field. And if the book was any good he could leap forward as its authentic champion and through it denounce the base modernism of the day. But how did Aubrey who was a superficial dabbler come by Elizabethan England?

Aubrey promised to produce the manuscript within a few days and left the club. A July sun hammered at the streets. The heat added to his inward discomfort. It was too hot to think. Yet it was necessary to think. Something was piling up and unless he thought it out clearly, it would fall on him.

He had made up his mind to publish his father's manuscript as his own. But in the weeks that had passed he had become aware that he was not going to carry out his intention. There were things that kept him from it. A morbid sense that his father was watching him had grown in his mind. He was afraid. At night in bed he conducted himself with a scrupulous politeness toward his wife, certain that his every action was being observed by his father.

There was another restriction. The appearance of the manuscript with his name to it would be a distasteful anti-climax. He had lost himself so long and so ardently in the creation of an inner Aubrey—the hawk-faced Isaiah redeeming men—that the prospect of a frankly sensual volume signed by Aubrey Gilchrist made him uncomfortable.

In the face of the realities that would ensue—the praise for instance, of the healthy animalism of the book—he would have to abandon the secret characterization that had grown almost an essential of his life. He could not go ahead redeeming men and lifting them toward a life of asceticism while people were talking and writing about the fact that Aubrey Gilchrist was a sensual realist. And finally there was a feeling of dishonesty, inseparable from his fear of his father, but adding its weight to the restrictions.

As the feeling that he would never dare to publish the manuscript approached a certainty, Aubrey sought to force his own hand by telling his friends of the book, boasting of it and promising its early appearance. In this way he dimly hoped to make it socially necessary for him to produce the volume and that finally the social necessity of living up to his announcements would overpower the inner restraints. He was desperately throwing up bridges in the hope of being driven across them.

The dilemma slipped out of his mind as he walked toward his home. It was distasteful. The finding of the manuscript had, in fact, upset him more than anything which had ever happened. As he neared his residence a wilted sensation came into his thought. He had been trying eagerly to recover the full image of the inner Aubrey and derive a few hours of surcease in the easy contemplation of that great hero's triumphs. But now it occurred to him that Judge Smith and John Mackay, his partner, Fanny and her relatives and all his world were buzzing with gossip about his return to literature. The dilemma crawled wearily back into his mind.

Yes, they talked about it whenever they came to-

gether. There was Basine, the judge. He had seized Aubrey's hand and pumped it heartily when he heard of the book.

"That's the stuff. I like a man who can come back. Go to it, Aubrey."

Basine was a bounder. The way Fanny and the rest of them idolized him was disgusting. His mother-in-law—"Oh, the judge told me the most fascinating things about the situation in Washington." And then for an hour, an idiotic mumble about what the judge did, what he said, what he thought, what he hoped. Nobody ever mentioned Henrietta or the children. As if their existence was not only unimportant but dubious. Basine was an entity. He needed no background.

Aubrey wondered why his thought turned to his brother-in-law. Whenever he felt uncomfortable, or found himself in a distressing situation, his mind usually busied itself with comment on Basine. Anything distressful that happened, no matter how remote from the judge, always seemed to remind Aubrey of the man and recall to him the fact that he was a bounder and an ass and entirely unlikeable.

He entered his home in a dejected mood. Voices attracted him. Fanny was talking to a man. He paused before the opened door.

"Oh, hello Aubrey," Fanny greeted him. She stood up. Aubrey noticed she looked pale. Her eyes seemed to follow his observation.

"Isn't it hot though? I'm almost dead. I'm awfully glad you came home. You remember Mr. Ramsey, don't you?"

"How do you do," said Aubrey. "Yes, I think—"

"At mother's. Long ago. I'm sure you met him. He's an old friend of the family."

"How do you do, sir," Ramsey echoed, rising. The men shook hands. Aubrey stared at the dapper, high-strung figure with its flushed face and cool attire and tried to remember the man.

"If you'll pardon me," he smiled.

"Certainly, Aubrey."

"See you again, I hope," said Aubrey. Ramsey assented with a curious enthusiasm, accenting the situation uncomfortably. Fanny frowned and watched her husband walk to the stairs. As his steps died the two returned to their chairs.

"Oh it's hot," Fanny murmured. "Can't you go away till next month. I'm almost beside myself."

Her voice was low. Ramsey listened with disdain.

"And besides," she continued in a whisper, "I've given you all I can get. I haven't any more money."

"Money!" Ramsey snorted. "I'm not talking about money. I'm not asking for any." He stood up and frowned indignantly at her.

"I know, but—"

"I just dropped in for a talk."

He said this with a meaning smile and lighted a cigarette. He was very casual. She watched him helplessly.

"Oh, why beat around the bush. I'm sick of it. I can't stand it. How much do you want? I've given you three thousand. Surely that's . . ."

"I don't want any, thank you," he answered with mysterious sarcasm. "Not a nickle."

"Then what do you want?" Her voice was rising despite her fear of being heard. "This is the fourth time you've . . . you've hounded me."

"Oh, I hound you?" Again the mysterious sarcasm.

"If you'd only tell me what you want."

He smiled with the air of a man phenomenally at ease and returned to his chair.

"Nothing. Not a thing. I just dropped in for a chat, that's all."

His eyes regarded her triumphantly. Fanny returned their gaze. He was crazy. There was something crazy about him. He had called her on the telephone the day after seeing her in the hotel with Schroder. She had gone downtown to meet him. The whole business seemed like an impossible dream in retrospect. He had whined and begged for money. He was down and out, living from hand to mouth, his friends gone, his clothes in rags. He had known her father. She could save him. And he had never once referred to the incident in the hotel lobby. Neither had she. The conversation had been purely a needy friend and a philanthropically inclined woman. She had asked him how much he needed and he answered $1,500 would start him. A week later he came to her completely rehabilitated—an elderly looking fop swinging a cane and bristling with enthusiasms.

Another $1,500 had increased his enthusiasm. He came a third time to report that he had found employment. She barely listened. Something had happened to Ramsey.

Now as he sat smiling sarcasms at her she realized what it was. Her knowledge of the man was casual but the thing that had happened was unmistakable. He no longer wanted money from her. He was blackmailing her merely because it gave him a sense

of power. They had never mentioned Schroder or the lobby incident.

She regarded him in silence and the understanding of the man slowly nauseated her. His polite and affable smiling, his cockiness and his suavity—all these were part of a pose. He called merely to see her wince and because her wincing filled him with this sense of power. And he would go on like that. But she dared not challenge him. He knew about the day with Schroder. He had never mentioned it and now he tried to pretend this his dominance over her had nothing to do with blackmail or Schroder. He tried to pretend it was because of something else—something involved and mysterious.

"Are you going to stay forever," she murmured.

"Perhaps for dinner," he answered. Fanny sighed. There was her mother-in-law—a stone faced woman with gimlet eyes. Old, ferreting eyes. She would sense something. And if they found out. She shuddered. Her eyes implored.

"Please, Tom," she whispered. "You . . . you're torturing me."

"Oh no, not at all," he answered with an idiotic cheerfulness, raising his eyebrows and pursing his lips in surprise. He was like a farce actor. She stood up and came to his side. Her hands rested on his shoulder.

"Won't you leave me alone?" she whispered again. "I feel ill."

He looked at her with concern.

"Indeed," he said. "I'm awfully sorry."

He would go on like this forever. It would always grow worse. He wanted to make a victim of her. He was like a crazy man with an obsession. His

suavity and politeness almost made her scream. She covered her face and wept.

"There, there," he consoled her. She had dropped into a chair and he was patting her back. "It must be the heat. The heat, don't you think? Oh well, I'll go way now. Are you going to be home Tuesday evening?"

She made no answer. Ramsey stood watching her, a smile in his eyes. As she continued to weep he appeared to grow more and more elated. A sternness entered his voice.

"Come now," he ordered her, "sit up."

She obeyed.

"It's ridiculous," he continued. She nodded helplessly. "I'll see you Tuesday evening," he added. There was a pause. Then, "There's something I'd like to discuss with you. Very important. Don't forget. Tuesday evening."

He walked out. Fanny watched him to the door. A rage came to her. He was play-acting. He was making fun of her, of her fear of exposure. Because he was crazy. He didn't want money. He wanted to bulldoze and torture her. He wanted her to think he was somebody—that's why he did it.

She stood up and watched him from the window as he walked down the street. A dapper, good-natured figure smiling with mysterious condescension upon the houses he passed. She rushed to her room and locked the door. Something would have to happen. She had not talked to Schroder about Ramsey since he left her in the cab that first day. She would ask him what to do. No, that would make it worse. He might be like Ramsey. She lay dry-eyed and pondering. The thought slowly grew in her—she

would tell her brother. George would be able to figure out some way to rid her of this blackmailer. She would tell him everything and explain to him how she couldn't stand it any longer.

She lay quietly improvising her conversation with her brother. This brought a relief and she closed her eyes with a sigh.

19

The ballroom of the Hotel LaSalle had been carefully prepared for the opening of the Vice Investigating Commission's sessions. A corps of janitors had been active for two days introducing folding chairs, cuspidors, tables and wastebaskets. Chairs of varying degrees of importance had been assembled for the witnesses, attorneys, distinguished visitors and members of the press.

The Vice Investigating Commission had been appointed by the governor of the state. It was comprised of ten members including its chairman, Judge Basine. The press with its instinctive dramaturgy had centered its comment around the single figure of Basine. The nine state senators who, as a result of political wire pulling, had wormed their way into the Commission found themselves lost in the shadow of Basine.

It was the Basine Commission. As the time for its sessions approached, the press, having by its own headline reiteration of the man's name impressed itself with the prestige and popularity of Basine, abandoned itself without further scruples to its convenient mania of simplifications. Thus the preliminary deliberations of the Commission were headlined, "Basine to Summon Department Store Heads." "Basine to

Plumb Vice Causes." "Basine Charges Dance Hall Evil."

The statements elaborately prepared by the nine senators were invariably attributed in the newspaper columns to Basine. The hopes, plans, fears, threats of the Vice Commission were blazoned to the world as the mingled emotions of Basine. Photographs of Basine, his wife, children, and home, illumined the papers and within a week the name Basine had, in the public mind, become innately synonymous with an immemorial crusade against vice.

The crusade itself remained as yet a vague but promising morsel in the city's thought. The newspapers, enabled by the event to indulge themselves more legitimately than usual in discussing the ever fascinating problem of sex from the unimpeachable standpoint of reform, leaped greedily to the bait.

Photographs of young women boarding street cars and revealing stretches of leg were printed under the caption, "Indecent Way to Board Car, Says Basine." Alongside were photographs, less interesting, but vital to the moral of the layout, showing women boarding street cars without revealing their legs. The caption over them read, "Correct Way to Board Car, Says Basine." The text explained that the carelessness and immodesty of young girls, according to Basine, frequently were the devil's ally and that the Basine Commission called upon all young women who had the welfare of the race at heart to board street cars in the correct way.

Photographs of young women in Indecent Bathing Costumes appeared accompanied by denunciations from prominent clergymen and contrasted, with editorial indignation, to photographs of Decent Bathing

Costumes recommended by prominent clergymen. Photographs of abandoned young women who effected garter purses, slit skirts; who crossed their legs when they sat down were offered. These were accompanied by outraged pronouncements against such immodesties from prominent statesmen and clergymen.

A private auxiliary crusade started by another enterprising newspaper resulted in a series of photographs of nude paintings to be seen in the shop windows of the loop and Michigan avenue, and called for immediate legislation designed to remove this source of moral danger.

Photographs of the deplorably scanty costumes worn by musical comedy choruses and dancers in general; photographs pointing out with mute alarm the decline of modesty as instanced in the comparison of the fashions of yesteryear with the fashions of today; photographs of dance-hall scenes showing couples amorously embraced, cheeks together, bodies riveted to each other—these and others too numerous to tabulate cried for the reader's indignant attention out of the newspaper columns.

Every conceivable variant of denunciation which might be legitimately accompanied by a photograph of a woman or a group of women, received publication in interviews with pious divines, alarmed statesmen and serious-minded welfare workers. The newspapers, convinced by the twenty and thirty per cent increases in their week's circulation figures that the crusade was a vital part of the awakened moral sense of the city, devoted themselves with heroic disregard of party politics to acclaiming the Basine commission.

Basine found himself troubled by his sky-rocketing prestige. He went to bed the first night as a "judicial

inquirer into the causes of vice." He arose in the morning confronted with the fact that he was a "fearless Galahad on Moral Quest." Before retiring again he found himself a "Vice Solon Attacking Civic Corruption." And on the following morning he was "Basine, Undaunted, Flays Vice Ring."

On the day before the opening session he occupied his chambers and tried to dictate his way through a mass of correspondence that had accumulated. There were thousands of letters from determined churchgoers, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, all teeming with excited advice, prayers for success and redundant congratulations. Ruth waited with her pencil on her note book, her knee pressed warmly against his thigh and her eyes looking pensively out of the window at the summer day.

Basine had obtained a three weeks' vacation in order to devote himself to the work of the commission. His words came unevenly as he dictated. Newspaper headlines glared at him from the desk—"Modern Lincoln to Free Vice Slaves." "Basine to Determine Why Girls Go Wrong." "Basine Threatens Fearless Quiz Into Resorts."

His mind was alive with other headlines. Basine . . . Basine . . . the city was throbbing with his name. He had managed to maintain a skepticism for several days. Doris had kept his mind distressingly clear with her comments. And her friend, Levine. Her words had continued in his thought . . . "marvelous, George. The public is wallowing in an orgy of morbidity. I confess, it's beyond my pleasantest expectations. . . ."

He had protested. She was wrong. Indignation was being stirred. People were realizing the menace

of underpaid working girls and unlicensed dance halls. His sister smiled wearily. "Don't be an ass, or you'll spoil it all. Keep your head clear. Follow the newspapers and outwit them in cynicism."

And then Levine. He recalled the man's words and edited them into a rebuking essay—"The public is revelling in the salaciousness of nude photographs, raw statements and your anti-vice propaganda. They're utilizing virtue as a cloak for the sensually tantalizing discussion of immorality. Their indignation is an excuse by which they apologize for their individual erotic thrills by denouncing evil in others. Yes, the mysterious others identified as vice rings, white slavers and immorality in general. The whole business is a cunning debauch offered newspaper readers, a debauch which enables them to appear to themselves and to each other not as debauchees but as high crusaders behind the banners of Basine. And the good clergymen and the statesmen and the welfare workers rushing into print with revelations of immorality are inspired by nothing more intricate than a desire for publicity and an ambition to pose before the public in the guise of fellow crusaders and civic benefactors. Their benefactions, you see, consist of offering the public lurid sex statistics over which it may gloat in secret. And in the meantime, over these benefactions, over these exciting sex statistics and sexy photos and over the people who discuss them and roll them over on their tongue is thrown a protective fog of indignation."

Basine had derived from these talks in his sister's studio an uncomfortable vision. But the vision had gradually dissolved in his mind. On the day he had awakened to find himself a "Moral Champion

Promises Vice Clean-up" the dignity and high responsibility of his task had overcome him. What appeared to him an authentic fervor mounted in his veins. Hypnotized by the adulatory excitement surrounding his name, he acquired forthwith the characterization foisted on him by the headlines. Basine . . . Basine . . . the city throbbed with his name. The hope of a great moral rejuvenation was centered upon him. Another St. Patrick was to drive the snakes of evil out of the community. Another Lincoln was to do something—something equally ennobling to himself and his fellowmen.

The change effected his relations with Ruth. For a month he had been engaged in a species of sinless amour. Long walks, long talks, long embraces behind the locked doors of his chambers had resulted in nothing more tangible than a series of headaches and sleepless nights or unusual tenderness towards his piquantly startled wife.

He had excused his infidelity to Ruth while embracing Henrietta—he regarded his exaggerated interest in his wife as a betrayal of the girl—by assuring himself that it was for Ruth's own good. It lessened his desire for her and thus decreased the moral danger into which their love was leading her. In addition to this it was, of course, a convenient substitute for the emotions Ruth's embraces aroused in him and for the sense of guilt which invariably accompanied these embraces.

When he became a crusader Basine felt a further confusion in his attitude toward Ruth. He sat now attempting to dictate letters. Despite the amiable blur which fame had introduced into his thought and which for the past two weeks had obscured the details

of his day, he found himself studying the situation before him. The situation was Ruth. He would have preferred ignoring it. The scent which came from her summery shirt waist and the coils of her black hair, thrilled him. Her clear youthful face, the contours of her figure, the familiarity of her eyes —all this was pleasing and satisfying.

But the new Basine—the crusader, felt ill at ease. He must explain something to Ruth, explain to her that their love was no more than an ennobling comradeship and must never be more than that, a comradeship which would bring them together in this great cause of moral rejuvenation. He didn't want it put that crudely. But the idea kept repeating itself in his head. He kept thinking of what Doris and her friend Levine would say if they ever found out that in the midst of the Vice Investigation, its chairman had been carrying on with his secretary. It was distasteful and needed immediate attention.

He took her hand and Ruth laid down her pencil. She smiled expectantly at him. Since she had first kissed Basine a month ago she had been trying to understand the situation. The thought of him preoccupied her and this made her certain she loved him. His caresses aroused her senses and left her wondering what was going to happen.

At times she reasoned coolly with herself. She was in love with a married man and the most she could hope for was to become his mistress and end up by making a fool of herself. Or perhaps of both of them. She was, in a measure, grateful for the manner in which he respected her virtue. But, with his arms around her and his keen face alive with pas-

sion and his lips on hers, his reserve struck her as uncomplimentary and illogical.

She resented the semi-abandonment of his senses because of the unfulfillment—a physical and spiritual unfulfillment which left her distracted. It appeared to her later, when the distraction ebbed, as an affront to her vanity. She was uncertain when thinking of it coolly whether she would give herself to him. But somehow the affair seemed unreal, at times even a little like some school-girl flirtation, because he failed to ask her. She had always prided herself upon her honesty and spent hours now debating with herself just how much she loved him and if she loved him at all and why she loved him. The idea of leaving his employ, however, never occurred to her. The cautious sensualisms of which she had become an excited victim, held her. There was in these incompleted manœuverings behind the locked doors a curious fascination.

"What is it, George?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"Whew, I'm snowed under." His hands pushed the correspondence from him.

"You mustn't tire yourself, dear."

He nodded and his face assumed a serious air.

"I would like to talk over the work."

"The Commission?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I think it's going to be a wonderful success, George?"

"And you can help me."

He squeezed her hand. This was the note he had been searching for in his mind. He hesitated a moment, nevertheless, feeling an irritating incongruity

in what he desired to say. But the headlines glaring at him strengthened him. He was Basine the Moral Champion. The city was throbbing with his name. A hope centered about his name.

"The work is going to be hard," he began. "I intend to go to the bottom of the thing. The Commission after its hearings will be able to recommend legislation that will . . . that will . . ."

"Yes, I know George."

"Wipe out, or at least go a long way toward wiping out . . ."

His mind seemd to balk at the sentence. The word "immorality" withheld itself from his lips.

"I'll be glad to help where I can, as you know, dear," she whispered.

"I've subpœnaed all the department store heads to bring their books into court, I mean to the hearing, and reveal exactly what the wage scale for shop girls is. I'm convinced it's impossible for a girl to keep decent on $6 and $7 a week."

He thought of the fact that Ruth was receiving $30 a week and grew confused.

"You can help me a lot, dear," he added hurriedly.

Ruth stood up. This standing up had become a habit between them. When they were sitting holding hands, if she stood up, he would draw her to him and she would lower herself into his lap. They had developed a series of similar ruses to which they both adapted themselves like well rehearsed actors and which had for their object the bringing them into positions convenient for kisses and embraces.

As she sat down in his lap the unhappy thought crossed Basine's mind that he was chairman of a commission sworn to wipe out just such incidents as this

from the city's life. He winced and her arm around his neck felt uncomfortable. But he remembered that both doors were locked and the image of himself as a crusader partially vanished. They kissed and his hand slipped down to her side and toyed with the hem of her skirt.

"Do you love me, George? Tell me."

"Yes. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh because. Sometimes I think you're so busy that you haven't time to love."

He was pleased by this. Flattered, he answered: "I have time for nothing else. Everything else is sort of part of it. My work, the commission—it's all you, dearest."

His hand was on her, caressingly. He endeavored to remove the significance of the gesture by patting her knee as one might pat the head of a little child, and whispering with an involved frankness:

"You're so nice, darling."

They had sat like this before, sometimes for an hour, whispering to each other. Their whispering would go on for a time, even their kisses. This time, however, she murmured unexpectedly:

"Don't, George."

He was surprised.

"Why not?"

"Because, we mustn't."

"But why?"

"Oh please . . . dont!"

Her objection seemed to inspire him in a way her previous silences had failed to do. He grew indignant.

"Please, don't!"

"But why, dearest? I love you."

She paused and he looked at her, aloof arguments in his eyes as if he were pleading not in his own behalf but in behalf of—a somebody else, a client. His knees were trembling under her weight. The crusade had disappeared. A memory of it lingered but in an amusing way. He caught a glimpse of the headlines on his desk and grinned. There was something maliciously unreal about life that one could enjoy.

Suddenly he felt her soften. Her lips brushed against his ear and her arm tightened convulsively around him.

"Please no," she murmured.

Her alarm delighted him. It was a final barrier, this alarm. It enabled him to enjoy the new conquest without having to be logical, without having to go on. Her alarm now was a barrier to be played with for a moment and then utilized. He would stop in a moment but now he could play with her fear, as if he were intent upon overcoming it.

"Please," she whispered, "don't . . . it's no use."

The final words irritated him. No use! He felt offended, as if he had been trickily defeated in an argument. What was no use? What did she mean?

"George, please, listen to me. Oh please . . ."

That was better. But it had come just in time. He could retreat now with honor. For an instant a panic had filled him. Impossible to retreat on the explanation "it's no use." Because—well, because the words were a challenge, not an attack. But now it was easy. He stiffened in his chair. Ruth slipped from his lap and stood up, flushed. She straightened her hair and looked away. Basine felt annoyed with her. She had almost taken him by surprise. She had almost surrendered when the tactics of the game called for

her to protest and thus cover his retreat by making it the result of her protests. And not of his—well, of his determination not to forget his position.

But he would restore the tactic she had momentarily abandoned.

"Excuse me," he muttered, a plea in his voice, "I didn't realize. I didn't realize what I was doing. Forgive me, dearest."

He recovered his sense of self respect that, oddly enough, had deserted him, in making this apology. The apology meant that he had ceased only because she had protested too violently. And not because he had been afraid.

Ruth listened with a faint smile on her moist lips. She wanted to laugh.

"I didn't mean anything—really," he was saying. "You must forgive me. Come here—please." An air of soothing innocence rose from his voice and manner. He was reassuring her that he wasn't dangerous, that he wouldn't repeat these intimacies. The desire to laugh continued in her. Excuse him! For what? The laugh almost left her throat. She had given herself to him . . . and he had solemnly retreated for no reason at all.

She continued to smile. For the first time the distraction his caresses inspired in her was absent. Instead she felt quite normal. She was becoming indignant but normal. And there was amusement in her anger. She sat down and picked up her pencil. She was amused. She looked at a man who had become almost a stranger and nodded—forgiveness.

"Of course, George," she said. "I know you didn't mean anything, but . . ."

He frowned. Her tone angered him. She was mocking.

"Hadn't you better answer some of these?" she asked. Basine pursed up his lips importantly.

"You will be a great help, dear," he answered. "Some day I want to talk about something with you. But . . . but matters are too rushed now. I'm almost snowed under, I swear." This was putting it all on a different basis. He was a busy man. That's why he had retreated. He was needed for other things of vital interest to the community. He felt uncomfortable, despite the dignity of his frown. She was regarding him with placid eyes. He turned to one of the newspapers whose headlines were proclaiming the plans, and threats of Basine. There was the real Basine—in the headline. This other one, the one who had fumbled and messed things up with a girl —he ended his thought with annoyance. He despised himself. For a moment he glowered at her. He would stand up and seize her. She would realize, then, what his forebearance for her sake had been. His anger continued in his voice as he resumed the tedious dictation:

"Dear Governor:

"Everything is prepared for the opening next Monday. I have arranged special seats for any of your friends who may desire to attend. We are ready to launch an efficient and systematic inquiry into the causes of the vice conditions in our city as well as state. Please . . ."

20

The excitedly heralded Vice Investigation which, after several thousand centuries of criminal neglect,

was to take up the question of immorality, discover its causes, determine its remedies and put an end to this blot upon civilization, opened to a crowded house. The folding chairs introduced into the ball room by the corps of janitors were occupied. But they were insufficient. The corps of janitors had underestimated the extent of the public enthusiasm.

Men and women aflame with the ardor of crusade battled for place within hearing distance of the witnesses who were to recount, under careful examination, just why girls went wrong. The ball room was capable of seating a thousand. Another thousand pried their ways through the doors and stood six and seven deep against the ornamental walls. The somewhat mythical portraits of French noblemen, Cupids, Watteau ladies of leisure smiled urbanely out of the blue and white panels over their heads. The corridor outside the large room was thronged with still a third thousand pushing, prying, squeezing, and perspiring all in vain. The police had been summoned.

The press in its first pen picture of the stirring scene drew a significant distinction. Those within the ball room who had successfully stormed the doors and clawed their way into the weltering pulp of figures were identified as "a distinguished audience of society women, welfare workers, civic leaders and citizens come to lend their moral support to the great crusade."

Those who had failed in their efforts to gain entrance and who clung with patient heroism to the corridor, the lobby downstairs and even the boiling pavements outside, were dismissed scornfully as "a crowd of the morbidly curious, hungry for the sensational details promised by the investigators."

At ten o'clock the Commission itself arrived. The perspiring police opened a passage through the throng and the commission filed to its place at the table waiting at the end of the room. Newspaper photographers immediately leaped into concerted action. The boom and smoke of flashlights arose.

Delays and preliminaries followed. The room grew terrifically hot. Collars began to wilt, faces to turn red, feet to burn. But the delays continued. It was impossible to find out why there was delay. The crowd grew impatient. A racket of voices stuffed the room. Something had gone wrong . . . why didn't they start . . . they weren't doing anything . . . what were they waiting for . . . the public was grumbling.

As a matter of fact the commissioners were playing for time. A species of stage fright had overcome them. Each of them had arrived filled with a sense of high purpose and benign power. They were men upon whom the burden of lifting an age-old blot from the face of civilization had fallen. They had felt no hesitancy in the matter. They were going to tackle the situation like Americans—red-blooded Americans in whose heart burned the unfaltering light of idealism. There was going to be no shilly-shallying, no highfalutin theorizings. They were going to the bottom of this matter without fear or favor. They were going to find out just why girls went wrong and, having found this out, they were going to remove the cause, or causes if there were more than one, and thus put an end to immorality—at least in the great commonwealth of Illinois.

They were ten undaunted crusaders inspired with the unfaltering consciousness of their country's power and rectitude. In fact, it was not the Basine Commis-

sion which pushed through the throng but the Tradition of the United States, the Revered Memory of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and Nathan Hale, the Army that had never been licked, the Government of the People, by the People and for the People, that was better than any other government on the face of the earth. These walked behind the policemen through the throng.

But there was a human undertone to this Tradition about to grapple with the problem of Vice. Like Basine, each of the nine had at the beginning felt a slight discomfort. Their own pasts and even presents had risen in their thought to deride them. They were, alas, not without sin themselves. The dramatic coincidence was even possible that one of the witnesses called might point to a commissioner as the author of her ruin. This, in an oblique way, disturbed them. It lay like an indigestible fear upon the stomach of incarnated Tradition. But as the patriotic fervor mounted in them, they were able somewhat to master this selfish fear. Debating the matter vaguely in the silence of their own bedrooms they had achieved an identical triumph.

Yes, they were after all only men. They had sinned, were sinning regularly in fact. But they would be fearless. They would strike out with no reserve and if Vice turned an accusing forefinger upon them, they would sacrifice themselves. The chances were, however, that this would not happen. They experienced the inner elation which comes with non-inconveniencing confession. Regardless of what they were in secret, they would be able to reveal themselves publicly as men sitting in judgment upon Vice, as executioners of Vice. In this manner their material lives

became unimportant accidents. They were able within two weeks to enter the public concept of themselves. Their actual selves became, in their own eyes, inferior and irrelevant. They had achieved an idealization.

There was also another change. Once established in their own eyes as Virgins, like Basine they were soon under the hypnosis of headlines. As they walked to the hotel this morning they had entirely rid themselves of their normal individualities. They were no longer even ordinary virgins, embarked upon a vaguely scientific or social enterprise. They were, above that, the spokesmen of an aroused public, the dignified containers of the power of the People.

None of the ten with the exception of Basine had given the actual work before him any thought. They had not prepared themselves for the task by study. All of them were serenely, in fact belligerently, ignorant of the scientific thought of the world on the subject. The involved disclosures of psychologists, philosophers, economists and other specialists in race ethics were part of a childish abracadabra beneath their consideration. For they were the incarnated power of Tradition and of Public Opinion—two grave forces which needed no guilding light from such sources.

This power buoyed them and brought a stern light into their eyes. They believed in the People, and therefore in themselves as Spokesmen. Ten shrewd, wire-pulling politicians whose careers were identically darkened with chicanery and crude cynicism, they were able by the magic of faith to rise above themselves. They were able to feel the nobility of the phrases which they had so often utilized as cloaks for their private greeds and private spites. These were

the phrases of Democracy which proclaimed to an awed populace that it, the populace, was Master and that its will was a holy and unassailable force for progress and piety.

As spokesmen of the people these commissioners were concerned with furthering the great idealization of themselves which the people worshipped as their god. Reason was at war with this idealization. Reason was the species of morbid and inverted vanity which inspired man to disembowel himself as proof of his stupidity. It grappled with his illusions, crawled through his soul, hamstringing his complacency. It raised insidious voices around him, wooing him. To denude himself of hope, faith and charity—in short to become intolerable to himself.

The commissioners, as spokesmen, turned their back upon it. There was a happier outlet for the energies of man than the repudiation of himself as the glory of God. There was the unreasoning struggle for idealization—the miracle by which man, seizing hold of his boot straps, hoisted himself into Heaven. This struggle, arousing the guffaws and sneers of reason, was its own reward. It was the virtue that rewarded itself.

The perspiring little scene in the hotel ball room was a startling visualization of this happier struggle. Regardless of their sins, their greeds, hypocrisies, idiocies, the people desired to see themselves as incarnations of an ideal. This ideal had been carefully elaborated. Of late it had taken on a life of its own. It had grown like a fungus feeding upon itself. Man staring at the heaven he had created was becoming awed by its magnificence and extent. More than that this heaven was threatening to escape him,

to become incongruous by its very vastness. There was danger that his idealization, fattening upon a logic of its own, would become a bit too preposterous even for worship. Already this idealization proclaimed him as an apostle of virtue, as a moralist first and a biological product afterward; as believing in the credo of right over might, in the equality of blacks, whites, poor and rich; as a sort of animated sermon from the triple pen of a martyr president, martyr husband and martyr Messiah. Lost in a difficult admiration of this heaven, the people struggled in the double task of keeping the idealization of themselves from becoming too preposterous and of persuasively identifying themselves with their image.

The result of this struggle was apparent in the puritanization of idea becoming popular in the country. A spirit of martyrdom was prevalent. Men and women were enthusiastically martyring themselves —passing laws and formulating conventions in opposition to their appetites and desires—in an excited effort to overtake this idealization of themselves. Righteousness was becoming a panic. The Christ image of the crowd was slowly obliterating its reality. His halo was running away with man. Overcome with the necessity of keeping pace with the artificial virtues he had created as his God, he was converting himself, to the best of his talents, into an outwardly epicene, eye-rolling symbol of purity. There was this mirror alive with his own God-like image. And he must now be careful not to give the lie to the idealization of himself created partly by him and partly by the activity of logic.

The members of the Vice Investigating Commission entered the crowded room serene in the knowledge

that reason was their enemy and that God—that mysterious cross between public opinion and yesterday's errors—would vouchsafe them the power and keenness to cope with the problem before them.

They were innocent of intelligence but they had faith in the principles of their country and the principles of their country were founded upon the great truth that what the people willed must come to pass. Today the people of the commonwealth of Illinois willed that vice and immorality be abolished from their midst. Therefore it must come to pass that the ten citizens lowering themselves into the seats behind the table were ten irresistible instruments animated by the strength of public opinion.

For several minutes after they had seated themselves the commissioners remained staring with dignity at the throng. A vague and pleasant delirium occupied their minds. The Vice Investigating Commission had assembled and the business of removing the blot from the face of civilization would begin at once. The commissioners sat, pompously inanimate, waiting for it to begin.

The spectacle before them, the thousands of eyes focussed upon their little group at the long table, slowly awakened an uncomfortable disillusion in the commissioners. In fact, a little panic swept their minds. They had, of course, discussed the issues, passed resolutions and laid plans for grappling with the situation. But all these efforts had been part of the curious hypnosis which had overcome them. The sense of their power hypnotized them into fancying that their star chamber babblings were in themselves thunderblots. The sweeping promises, the all-embracing statements and resolutions passed and issued

for publication had filled them with an exalted sense of success. They had entered the ballroom under the naive conviction that the whole business had been already successfully consummated. They were taking their seats at the table not to launch upon a task but to receive the plaudits of the public for great work already accomplished; in fact to reap reward for the noble utterances attributed to them by the press.

But now with the pads of paper, the sharpened pencils, the business-like cuspidors at their feet, the ominous wastepaper baskets under their hands, the commissioners faced the ghastly fact that the blot was still on the face of civilization, untouched by their thunderbolts. And some millions of people whose delegates were staring at them were waiting excitedly for it to be removed.

It occurred as if for the first time to the commissioners that something would have to be done about it. Their expressions underwent a change. A pensiveness crept into their heavy faces. A bewilderment dulled the dignity of their stares. The room was unbearably hot. It was impossible to do any work in such a crowd. One could hardly hear oneself think above the noise. The commissioners frowned and whispered among themselves. Gradually a nervous jocularity came into their manner.

"Well, here we are. All set."

"Hm, I think we'd better call some witnesses."

"That's right. Call some witnesses. Where's Judge Basine?"

"Talking over there."

"Huh, why don't he do something?"

Yes, why didn't Judge Basine take charge of his

flock. It was his commission. The papers all said it was the Basine Commission. Then why didn't he start something. Instead of gabbing around with reporters.

"Good God! What a heat! Hasn't the management provided any fans?"

"Where's a bellboy? We'll send him after some fans. Think a dozen'll be enough?"

"Nothing doing. Three or four dozen at least. I'll wear out a dozen myself before this day's over, believe me."

"Say, ain't that right!"

"Oh Judge . . . Judge . . ."

"Yes, what is it, Senator?"

"What about the witnesses? Are we going to have any witnesses?"

"Of course. I'm just getting things ready."

"That's right. There's no rush. Open that window, won't you Jim?"

"God, what a mob. Well, we'd better do something, don't you think?"

"Leave it to Basine. Got a knife, Harry? This pencil's full of bum lead."

The whisperings and delays continued. Basine, however, began to recover himself. The eager, focussed eyes of the room were slowly electrifying him. His gestures were becoming more dignified. His manner acquired a definiteness.

The eyes regarding him saw a man with sharp features and an imperious expression moving with what seemed significant deliberation, examining papers, studying papers, opening papers, extracting papers, returning papers. Instinctively they felt that

here, centered in this cautiously dynamic figure, was the celebrated Vice Investigation.

Basine arose, a gavel in his hand, and pounded the table. The noises subsided as if a presence were being expelled from the room. The hush served to illumine the figure of Basine. The eyes waited. His voice arose, definite, impelling.

"Fellow Citizens, the Vice Investigating Commission appointed by the State of Illinois to determine if possible the causes of immorality and to remove, wherever possible, such causes, is now in session. The purposes of this commission need no further explanation. We are assembled here in the name of the people of this state to do all in our power to grapple with the problem of vice and its many auxiliary problems.

"This problem is today the outstanding menace to the welfare of our community. Its dangers touch us all. The immoral man and the immoral woman, the factors which contribute to their immorality, are our responsibility. This is no sentimental outburst, no vague uprising but an organized, official investigation with full powers to uncover facts. We are not here to dabble in theories, but to deal with facts. And for that purpose, and that purpose only, we are assembled under the laws of our state and the constitution of our country. The first witness called will be Mr. Arthur Core."

Applause thundered. Basine, flushed, sat down. The commissioners on each side of him breathed with relief. Something had been started. To their intense surprise Mr. Arthur Core actually arose from one of the witness chairs and came forward. Mr. Core was head of the largest department store in the city.

Basine with an instinct in which he placed implicit reliance had summoned him first, thus abandoning the plans the commission had decided upon in star chamber. It had been decided upon to save up the big guns for a climax. Basine's instinct warned him as he stood on his feet talking, that a climax was necessary immediately—a gesture which would at once reveal the power and fearlessness of the commission.

Mr. Core was the medium for such a gesture. Venerated as one of the wealthiest men of the city, the head of its most widely advertized and magnificent retail establishment, to hail him before the commission and belabor him with queries would be to capture the confidence of the public forthwith.

As Mr. Core, accompanied by two lawyers and a secretary laden with ledgers, advanced toward the table a sudden misgiving struck Basine. How much would the newspapers dare print about Mr. Core, particularly if the cross examination placed him and his establishment in an unfavorable light? Mr. Core meant upwards of $3,000,000 a year in advertising revenue. Perhaps he had made a mistake in calling him. The press would turn and fly from the commission as from a plague. There would be no headlines and the public would fall away.

Basine stood up as Mr. Core approached. He was a smartly dressed man with a cream-colored handkerchief protruding against a smoothly pressed blue coat; an affable, reserved face that reminded Basine of Milton Ware and the Michigan Avenue Club. Poise, suavity, courtesy exuded from Mr. Core.

"How do you do, Judge," he said with a bow, "and Gentlemen of the Commission."

Basine extended his hand and promptly regretted

the action. He had caught the emotion of the crowd. He realized that his instinct had not betrayed him.

Mr. Core was one of the most venerated citizens in the community, venerated for his power, his success and his aloofness from his venerators. The summoning of Mr. Core to take his place and be cross-examined by the Commission had sent a thrill through the crowd. They felt the elation of a pack of beagle dogs with a magnificent stag brought to earth under their little jaws.

Mr. Core was rich, powerful, brilliant. But they, the people, were greater than he. There he stood obedient to their delegated spokesman, the fearless Basine, and gratitude filled them as they noted Basine was a head taller than the great Mr. Core, and that the great Basine was not at all confused by the presence of this famed personage.

Basine as he felt the emotion of the crowd knew simultaneously that the newspapers, caught between their two vital functions—that of insuring their revenue by respectful treatment of its source, the advertising plutocracy,—and of insuring their popularity by the fearless advocacy of any current crowd hysteria, must follow the less dangerous course. And the less dangerous course now, as always, was with the beagle dogs who had brought a stag to earth.

After the handshake Basine looked severely about him. He was pleased to observe that his colleagues were non-existent. They sat coughing, sharpening pencils and gazing with vacuous aplomb at objects about them. He smiled with inward contempt. Little puppets under his hands. And the crowd before him—a smear of little puppets. Even the all-powerful newspapers, even the mighty Mr. Arthur

Core—he could manipulate them because there was something in him that was not in other people. A sense of drama, perhaps. But more than that, an understanding—a vision that enabled him to see clearly over the heads of people into the future. He could tell in advance which way people were going to turn and he could hurry forward and be there waiting for them—a leader waiting for them when they caught up.

A curious question slipped into his mind. "Why am I like that?" And then another question, "Why am I able to do things?"

The questions pleased him and as he followed Mr. Core into his chair he knew that the crowd had noticed that Judge Basine was a man unimpressed by the greatness of Mr. Core, that the eyes focussed on him had thrilled with the knowledge that he, Basine, was dressed as well as Mr. Core and that his own dignity and sternness were more impressive than the poise of Mr. Core. The great Mr. Core was second fiddle in the show. Basine was first fiddle and the crowd was thrilled by that. Because Basine was their man, their leader. And Mr. Core, venerated to this moment, was now their enemy. Basine was a man in whom the dignity of the people shone out more powerfully than the prestige of any enviable individual. These things whirled through Basine's thought as he turned to the witness.

"Mr. Stenographer," he announced, "you will please make accurate transcription of all questions and answers that follow."

A naive pride filled the attentive commissioners. The Investigation was after all a success. Regardless of what happened the mere fact that Arthur Core was

to be interrogated on the subject of immorality among working girls, constituted an overwhelming success. The conviction which now delighted them was shared by the thousands in the room and by the newspaper men scribbling at an adjoining table. All present felt certain that so dramatic a situation as the cross-examination of Mr. Arthur Core by the chairman of the Vice Investigating Commission was bound to result somehow in the instant removal of the blot from the face of civilization. Basine, clearing his throat, began the questioning.

"Your name?"

"Arthur Core."

"Your position?"

"President of Core-Plain and Company."

"That is the retail merchandise establishment in this city?"

"It is."

A full five minutes was consumed in the exchange of profound introductions. This concluded, Mr. Core was informed what the purposes of the Vice Investigation Commission were. The information failed to impress him. Whereupon he was informed that he, as an employer of thousands of girls, had been called to throw light on a vital question. First, what wages did his employes receive. Mr. Core, raising his eyebrows and looking aggrieved as if he had been asked a very crude and tactless question, replied that the average wage was $10 a week for the young women in his employ.

Did he think a young woman could keep virtuous on $10 a week? Alas, he had never given that phase of the economic system any thought. But if his opinion as an individual was worth anything, he would

offer the philosophical observation that wages had nothing to do with immorality.

A cynical observation. The crowd frowned. It didn't, eh? Lot he knew about it. And on what did he base this cold-blooded point of view? Well, on nothing in particular except his common sense. Indeed! His common sense! Well, well. So he thought that a normal young woman could live on $10 a week, feed, clothe and house herself on $10 a week and never feel tempted to earn more money by sacrificing her virtue? Alas, he had not thought of it in that way. He had merely thought that good young women were good and bad young women were bad. And wages had nothing to do with it. It was human nature. What! Human nature to be bad! Mr. Arthur Core was inclined to a cynicism which, fortunately, the great minds of the nation did not share. Had he ever sought to determine how many good girls there were in his employ? No, but he presumed they were all good. If they weren't he was sorry for them, but it was their own fault.

Thus the see-saw continued while the room grew hotter, while people packed against each other listened with distended eyes and opened mouths. Thus the commissioners, recovering from their panic, began to frown with importances. And Basine, still following the instinct in him—the sense of contact he felt with the crowd and situation, played another trump card. The afternoon newspapers were blazoning the news of Mr. Arthur Core. The morning papers would need an equally dramatic morsel. Basine adjourned the session to reconvene at 3 o'clock. The crowd remained. The heat increased. The session reconvened. It was businesslike now. It was

running like a machine. No more delays and indecisions.

"Call Miss Winona Johnson."

Basine sat amid heaps of documents, ledgers and commissioners, in charge. It was he who asked the questions, whose face was the battlefront of the People versus Vice.

Your name? Winona Johnson. Your occupation? A pause. And then in a lowered voice, a prostitute. What was that?—from Mr. Stenographer. A prostitute, from Basine clearly and indignantly. Sensation. She was a prostitute, this yellow-haired, gaudy creature in the witness chair. She had her nerve. How long have you been a prostitute, Winona Johnson? Well, two years, I guess. She guessed. As if she didn't know. And before that what were you? She was a clerk. Where were you employed as a clerk, Winona? Where? Oh, I worked for Core-Plain and Company. There it was—the sort of thing that made climaxes. A new lead for the morning papers—a new thrill for the tired breakfasters. "Tells Tragic Story of Moral Downfall." And then in smaller headlines, "Former State Street Clerk Uncovers Snares, Pitfalls of City." And then photographs; comparisons between Mr. Core's statements and Miss Johnson's statements. Mr. Core's picture and Miss Johnson's picture side by side so that one might almost think, unless one read carefully (and who did that?) that the venerated Mr. Arthur Core had been exposed by the all powerful Basine Commission as the seducer of the pathetic Miss Winona Johnson.

Through the weltering afternoon the great investigation progressed, Basine, unaided, carrying the fight.

A Champion, an Undaunted One, his voice growing hoarse, his eyes flashing tirelessly, his questions never failing; incisive, compelling questions that seemed for all the world as if they were slowly, tenaciously coming to grips with the Devil.

A great day for the commonwealth of Illinois. A day surfeited with climaxes. Winona Johnson wept and the courteous voice of Basine pressed for facts. Here was a mine of facts, here a witness who could reveal something . . . And she did . . .

That will be all, thank you, from Basine. Winona arose. Eyes devoured her. A terrible curiosity played over her face and body. Civilization had been stunned. Everyone knew, of course, that prostitutes sold themselves to men. But to so many!!! Horrible! A revelation to make thinking men think, thinking women, too.

If there had been any doubt in the public mind concerning the sincerity of the Commission, this day had removed it. Two welfare workers and a second department store owner concluded the bill. The newspapers spread the questions and answers through the city. A determined light came into the eyes of the millions who read. The commonwealth was at grips with evil. Facts had been exhumed in a single session that were intolerable to a civilized community. A hue and cry would be raised. Things would be done. The millions reading felt this. Something would have to be done. Resolutions would be passed. Thunderbolts would be hurled by civic bodies, lodges, clubs. The thing called for action, action and more action. But wait and see what the morning papers would have to say. There would be remedies in the morning papers. Things would be done overnight

by the morning papers to put an end to this iniquity —prostitution!!!! And there could be no question but that underpaid workers were driven to lives of shame. And the dance halls, they hadn't gotten around to them yet. And factories and hotels—wait till it came their turn. They would all be grilled, quizzed, flayed.

Basine made his way slowly through the throng. Tomorrow's session would begin at eleven o'clock. He was tired. The work had exhausted him. But his head felt clear. Without raising his eyes he understood the admiration of the crowds through which he was moving. They were repeating his name among themselves saying, there he goes . . . that's him . . . He had understood things in this manner all day, without giving them words.

He felt at peace. He had gone through a test. Now he knew he was a leader. The thing of which he had been afraid had turned out to be easy. He smiled, remembering his colleagues. Simple, blundering men who had floundered around trying to horn in. But this wasn't the private banks crusade, not by a long shot. Ah, that was playing a long shot—calling Core like that. But it had worked. Newsies were yelling around him. Extra—all about! About Basine, of course. About him. Yes, there was leadership in him. He was a man who could sweep people along with him.

The crowds were going home. All these people belonged to him. Constituents. He smiled pleasantly at the hurrying figures. It was hot and they were perspiring. Their eyes were filmed with preoccupations. But what would happen if they were told suddenly that Judge Basine was passing them, rubbing

shoulders with them? Their eyes would brighten. They would forget about the things that were worrying them. They would look up and smile. Perhaps cheer.

Day dreams lifted his thought out of the present. This thing was only a beginning. He would go on. There was a kinship in him with people. The memory of the day lay like a love in his heart. He was still young. Years ahead of him and he would end—where? High up.

He looked around and noticed he was walking toward Doris' studio. Odd, he hadn't been aware where he was going. But he might as well. He frowned. She would ridicule what had happened. Well, that was all right. Her hatred of such things couldn't wipe out what was in his heart now. He became practical. Think of tomorrow's session. But why? The details were annoying. He had had enough details for one day. He would take care of things when the proper time came. This was a sort of reward, to walk and dream. As for the blot on the face of civilization, yes that would all be taken care of at the proper time. But the important thing, the most important thing was Basine—high up.

21

Schroder looked at his watch. Late, perhaps she wouldn't come. Intellectual women were always the most uncertain. It was twilight. Summer bloomed incongruously in the small city park.

"She probably didn't mean it, anyway," he thought.

Ruth appeared walking calmly down the broad pavement. He watched her. She had come, but the

business was still uncertain. Amorous affairs were one thing. Seduction was another. He liked her, of course. But what if she had notions about things? Love, fidelity, virtue, marriage, decency. Oh well, he could always step away and say good-bye, I'm sorry.

"Hello," he said aloud. "You're late."

"I wasn't coming."

"I didn't think so, either."

She was one of the kind who made a pretense of frankness. If you let her she would talk about sex till the cows came home, as if it were a problem in algebra. He knew the kind. Full of theories . . .

"Where shall we go, Paul?"

"Let's sit here a while. How's his Honor."

"I don't know. I resigned last week."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, after the Commission adjourned for the summer."

The memory of the commission made him smile.

"Goofy," he said.

She nodded. "But Judge Basine is made, don't you think?"

He took her hand.

"So you left him," he smiled. They sat in silence. He would wait for her to take the lead. She began talking as the park grew darker.

"I didn't intend coming," she said, "because I . . . I know what you want."

Her voice quivered and her fingers tightened over his hand.

"But I came to tell you . . . I can't. I'm not being foolish or anything. But—it isn't worth it."

He looked at her and wondered. The invitation was clear. He must begin pleading now and making

love. He hesitated because she had started crying. Tears were on her cheeks.

She was remembering Basine.

"Don't," he whispered. "I wouldn't ask you to do anything like that. We've talked, of course. But that was just talk. Ruth, I love you."

"But love doesn't mean anything to you," she answered.

And the answer to that was marriage. He hesitated. Tears always stirred him. Now it was dark. He placed an arm around her. The stiffening of her body decided him.

"We'll get married," he said.

The assurance did not delight her. Marriage was something foreign. But she stood up when he asked her to and followed him. She walked along thinking of herself as if there were two Ruths. One was walking with a man—where? The other was thinking about things. But there was little to think about. If it had been Basine instead of this other, it would have been nicer. Basine was someone she knew. Paul was a stranger. But Basine had played with her. He had said nothing when she went away. Merely looked at her and nodded. His success had gone to his head. He didn't want her, even to flirt with anymore. He was too busy . . .

She put her arms around the stranger and wept.

It was minor tragedy. There was nothing to weep about. Nobody cared what happened to her. If there had been somebody who cared she would never have met him.

Schroder watched her and sighed.

"If you don't love me," he said.

"It's not that," she answered. She was forgetting

about her tears. Her close presence to him was slowly preoccupying her. He loved her. And they would be married. It didn't matter much. But the idea made it a little easier. She kissed him, timidly at first. And then with passion.

Schroder grimaced inwardly. It was dark and she couldn't see his eyes. They were worried. He had been in love for a few minutes in the park. He would have liked to remain in love. He sat before the window thinking, Why did women insist on climaxes. Their arguments made it necessary for men to plead. The culmination was a sort of logical gesture.

He walked toward her. He would take her hand and make love. He felt sad and making love out of sadness was always an interesting diversion.

"Ruth," he whispered, "do you love me?"

She answered by embracing him.

"Always the same," he murmured to himself, "it's no use."

22

The children were asleep and Henrietta was reading. Basine in his slippers and smoking-jacket sat unoccupied. Their new house worried him. He had not yet familiarized himself with its shadows.

He smiled as he watched his wife. He was going to run for Senator but that made no difference to her. He was a husband to her, and everything else was incidental. He thought of Ruth. Her name no longer depressed him. During the first three or four months that followed her absence he had felt as if his career had ended. There was nobody to succeed for any more. Then through Doris he had learned that she was to marry Schroder.

The information had cured him. He had been despising himself for letting her go. Now he was able to pretend that he had been forced by her virtue to relinquish her. It would have been a dastardly thing to do—ruin her and prevent her from marrying and living a decent life. Her marrying vindicated his own virtue. He was able to think that he had done the right thing. Not only that, but he had done the only thing possible. She had fled from him because he was a married man. Then, too, she probably didn't love Schroder. Not as she had loved him. She was marrying him broken-heartedly. He sometimes played with this notion. It pleased him. His sadness at the thought of her in another man's arms was mitigated by the two-fold thought that her heart was broken and that she was in reality embracing marriage and not a man.

He no longer desired her. He was too busy for one thing. Still, things were different. She had been an inspiration. Now he went on with his plans and his climb without feeling the excitement that had filled him during their year together. There was no one in front of whom to pose. This made posing a rather thankless business. And he became practical in his thoughts, less dramatic in his lies.

Henrietta had put aside her paper and was looking at him.

"Are you tired?" she asked.

He shook his head. He began to think about her. What did she do all day? Since Ruth had left, his desire to leave his wife had vanished. He paused, confused. She was weeping.

"What's the matter?" he asked. She lowered her head.

"Nothing," she said.

A vivid memory hurt him. He remembered kissing her for a first time in his mother's kitchen years ago. It seemed now that she had been alive and beautiful that evening. That was gone.

"Has anything happened," he asked softly.

Her head shook. He came to her side and looked at her. He felt helpless. What was there to make her cry?

"I don't know, George," she said as if answering his silent question. "Please forgive me. I just started to cry for nothing."

"Worried about something?" he pressed. He felt guilty. She was crying because of the things he had done. But what had he done? Nothing wrong. He had put the wrong things out of his life. And for her sake. Why should she weep about that, then? He was the one to weep. And she had her children. Her father was alive. He remained silent, recounting what he tried to consider anti-weeping reasons.

"Nothing, George," she answered. "I'm . . . I'm just getting old."

He frowned and turned away.

Later when they lay in bed he took her in his arms. She had apparently forgotten about her tears and their curious explanation. But he began to talk to her.

"Old," he whispered, "you're not getting old. Don't be silly. At least no more than I am. I'm older than you."

He held her close to him and his mind embraced a memory. This was not his wife he held, but someone else. A vivacious, happy girl ten years ago. No, more than that. Almost fourteen years ago. He lay

remembering another Henrietta—a charming, delightful child. He had never been in love with her. This he knew. But the knowledge had slowly died. When he embraced her at night a dream obscured his memory. The dream was that he had once loved her, that she had once been beautiful, that his heart had once sung with desire for her.

He played with this dream. It was a make-believe that saddened him. Yet it made the moment more tolerable. Sometimes it even brought a curious happiness. His dream would pretend that the scrawny figure he was holding had once filled him with ecstasies. His dream would whisper to him that he had once idolized her and that once . . . once. He would lie editing his sterile memories of her into glowing once-upon-a-times. And when his kisses sought her cold lips it would be to this dream-Henrietta they gave themselves, a Henrietta who had never been. It was sad to pretend in this way that his great love had died and that his beautiful one had faded. But it was not as sad as to remember when he kissed her that there had never been anything.

He felt tired when he left the house the next morning. The business of preening for the senatorial race annoyed him. The goal lured but the details to be managed were aggravating.

He started as he opened the door of his chambers. Ruth! He stood looking at her without words. She was pale and there was something curious about her. She didn't look the same.

"You look surprised," she smiled. He noticed how spiritless she was. "But . . . you don't mind my coming here, do you. I've been trying to get you."

She turned her eyes away. He had finally discovered the change, a physical one.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I hadn't heard the good news. How's Paul."

So she was married. And had kept it secret. He smiled. He remembered other scenes in the room. The doors locked. Her arms around him. All that was over now. Before her motherhood, even the memory of it seemed less certain.

"There is no good news," she was saying. "I've come to see if you can help me."

They sat down. Basine nodded. Money. Poor girl. Schroder was always an ass about things.

"He's gone away," she went on. "And . . . and I'd like to locate him."

"Who?"

"Paul."

She covered her face. So he had deserted her. And she had come back to him. A momentary excitement entered his thought. But he frowned immediately. It was distasteful to think of what might have been if . . . not for this.

An amazement came into his eyes. He stared at her as she talked. She had been ruined by Schroder and he had never married her. And when she had refused medical interference he had calmly left the city. He listened blankly and could think of nothing to say.

"Oh George, you must help me."

Help her! He must help her! After she had lived with this man for months, giving herself to him! He stood up and walked down the room. It was like he used to do, pace up and down in front of her.

He wanted to talk but he found it hard. A rage was coming into his mind that obscured his words. The rage continued. Pausing in the center of the room Basine began to swear. His voice had grown high pitched.

"Damn!" he shouted at her, "and you come to me. Me! You bring your filthy sins to me! Damn his dirty soul! Yes, you're fine, you are! Leaving me to go with that chippy-chaser. I thought . . . I thought you were somebody."

He stopped, his fist in the air. She was walking away.

"Ruth," he called after her, "listen, wait a minute."

The door closed after her. Basine stood watching the door. She would open it and come back. But the door remained shut. He seated himself at his desk. Moments passed and he was surprised to wake up and hear himself mumbling. "The dirty skunk! I'll wring his neck!"

She had given herself to Schroder! Not married him . . . The part he had played in her ruin forced itself with a nauseating insistency into Basine's mind. His memories seized him. He struggled, but the things he knew leaped out of hiding-places and assaulted him. She had loved him. And he had loved her. Life had seemed marvelous with her close to him. His career, his day, its simplest detail, had been colored with delicious excitement. But he had been afraid to reach out and take what he wanted. It would have meant success, happiness and something else—the word beauty withheld itself—it would have meant these things. But he had feared possession. He had let her go away after kissing her and telling her that he loved her. So she had gone walking in

the street and fallen into the arms of the first man she met. It was plain.

Basine writhed under triumphant accusations. A torment filled him. He must escape from the accusations He pried himself away from his thoughts and took his place on the bench. Other people's troubles again. Disputes, wrangles, testimonies—his ears listened mechanically. Lawyers were pleading with him. Witnesses were stammering. He sat with a scowl and hunched forward in his chair. His lean face thrust itself at the courtroom.

Thoughts too intolerable for his attention whirled sickeningly in a background. Pictures of Ruth in the man's arms, of her surrender, of the intimacies of their illicit affair forced themselves upon him. He loved her. "Oh, damn him," sang itself darkly through his heart.

There was one mocking intruder that raised a vociferous head. "You might have had her. Not he. She might have been yours if you hadn't been afraid." It was this that nauseated most. Not Schroder's villainy, but his own cowardice. He had lost through cowardice.

The day dragged itself along. He had recovered in part the rage which protected him from the intolerable memories. When he left the courtroom it was with a viciousness in his step. His feet stamped down as he walked, as if they were attacking the pavements. He entered a saloon several blocks from the City Hall.

The place was almost deserted. A few business-like looking men were grouped before the long bar. They were laughing. Basine passed them and a voice called his name. He turned and saw a familiar face

in one of the small booths against the wall. It was Levine, the newspaperman.

"Hello, Judge. Come on over and sit down."

Basine narrowed his eyes. The man was partially drunk. His drawn face, usually pale, was flushed and his sneering black eyes were bloodshot. He sat down opposite Levine with a greeting. A waiter brought drinks.

"What's up, Judge, you seem rather low," Levine laughed quietly. "The world been falling on your nose? Ha, have another. Here, waiter . . ."

They sat drinking, the newspaperman lost in a mysterious excitement that gathered in his voice. The excitement soothed Basine. The drinks brought a haze into his mind. He became aware that the man was talking about his sister. He was leaning forward, a black forelock over his bloodshot eye, his arm thrown out on the table, and talking in a languorous voice about Doris.

"Drowning my troubles, judge," he was saying. "It's easier to drink yourself into forgetfulness than to lie yourself into forgetfulness, eh? And besides you grow sick of lying, eh. Nobody lies more than me, and I know, I know. But it ain't my fault—she's gone mad about him. You know him—Lindstrum, the poet. Been mad about him for years. And it gets worse . . . that's all that's the matter with her. He ran away years ago and she's gotten a phobia about people. Because he's the people's poet. Ha, she's told me about you, George. Got an idea of making this man Lindstrum sick by showing him how rotten people are. And using you. See? But where do I come in? Nowhere . . . nowhere. Just gabbing for years and I don't come in nowhere . . . Get me?

This damn newspaper drool has eaten into me. . . She's the only one I wanted. But I don't come in, see? She's mad . . . gone mad . . ."

Basine's thought avoided the man's words. He sat with a blissful vacuity. They drank till it grew night. Basine, as if recalling himself, walked out. The newspaperman lay across the table, his head asleep on his arm.

The night was cool. A curious impulse to let go came to Basine. He would go somewhere and find women and noise. He walked along thinking about this. When he had walked for an hour the impulse was gone. The haze was slipping from him. He recalled things Levine had said. Something about Lindstrum, the poet. His mind played with Lindstrum. He had seen him—where? Oh yes, long ago. That was before he'd become famous. Now he was a great poet. Hell with everything. . . Get the senatorship and let things slide.

He walked along toward his home. Henrietta would be asleep. He sighed. The night was cool. Everything all right in the morning. Now, everything all wrong. But in the morning—

His stride quickened. He felt half asleep and as he moved over the deserted pavement he began mumbling, "I love you, George, I love you . . ."

23

Doris was ill. The doctor had telephoned her mother and Mrs. Basine was sitting beside the bed holding Doris' hand. A man she remembered vaguely was standing in a corner of the room smoking. It was the poet, Lindstrum, who was once a

friend of Doris. He had been there when she arrived, standing by the window and smoking while the doctor was fixing an ice pack on Doris' head.

The doctor had been unable to make a diagnosis. She had a fever but they would have to wait for more definite symptoms.

As the twilight filled the studio, Mrs. Basine grew frightened. She thought at moments Doris was dead, she lay so still. She watched the half-closed eyes anxiously. Perhaps Doris would die. And George was in Washington. She had telegraphed but he couldn't arrive till the next day. She sat wondering about her daughter. She remembered her as a child, then as a girl.

"Changes, changes," she sighed. Changes that excited one, but all they did was bring one nearer to this. She was thinking of death.

"How do you feel now, Doris?"

No answer. The burning eyes continued to stare, the hand she held remained limp and dry in her fingers. Perhaps it was nothing serious. Merely a fever. She sat nodding her head at her thoughts. She thought of how her children had grown up and gone away. Fanny, George, Doris, Aubrey, Henrietta, Mrs. Gilchrist, Judge Smith and the grandchildren. These were the names of her family. They were part of her. Yet while the rest of the world grew more and more familiar they grew more and more strange.

"Does it pain you anywhere, Doris?"

No answer. Poor little Doris. She stroked her face. Life had used her differently. She felt this. She knew nothing of what Doris had done or

dreamed, but the staring eyes frightened her and she understood.

George frequently called her queer. Yet George was, in a way, proud of her. He used to seek Doris out. And many people had talked of her as a very unusual young woman. But life had used her curiously, not like other girls. Perhaps it was a man. She turned toward the figure in the corner. He was standing holding a pipe to his mouth. What if it was a man? Scandal. Mrs. Basine sighed. What was scandal? It was only a way of looking at facts. She would take her home with her. Poor little Doris living alone in this place and sitting here night after night dreaming of things. That was sad.

"Listen dear, do you want something?"

No answer. The doctor said he would be back after dinner and bring a nurse. She would ask him if Doris could be moved and then take her home. It was growing darker in the room. Someone was knocking. She opened the door. It was another man. He came in and then paused.

"Is Doris ill?" he asked.

Mrs. Basine nodded.

"I am her mother," she said.

Levine looked at her and introduced himself.

"You know Mr. Lindstrum," she added. Levine stared at the poet in the shadows and said, "Yes, I know him."

"How do you do," said Lindstrum slowly.

Doris reached her hand up as Levine approached the bed. He took it and she whispered, "Don't go away." She tried to rise.

"You musn't dear," her mother cautioned.

"Oh yes," Doris voice appeared to be growing

stronger. "I want to sit up. Help me, Max." He arranged the pillows. The ice-pack fell from her head. She smiled.

"You haven't eaten anything, mother," she added. "Please, there's a restaurant around the corner."

Mrs. Basine stood up. It might be better to go away for a while. Despite her daughter's momentary recovery her fears had increased. She felt something curious about Doris. But perhaps it was just the fever. She left the room with a final glance at the flushed face. Doris had always been strange, but there was something disturbing about her now. Her daughter's eyes watching her opening the door, chilled her heart suddenly. She held herself from rushing to her side and taking her in her arms. She didn't know why, but she was certain there was something strange about Doris. She walked into the hall. Yes, she was certain something terrible was going to happen.

When the door closed Doris sat against the pillows, her white face turned toward Lindstrum in the shadows.

"Did you hear we were going to war, Lief?" she asked. Behind his pipe in the shadows the grey faced figure of Lindstrum nodded.

"George is a Senator," she added. "He's going to declare war, Lief. You remember my brother George."

"Doris, you musn't," Levine whispered. "Lie back, please."

She covered her face and her body shuddered.

"The filthy ones are going to war. Come closer, Lief. I want to see you."

Lindstrum approached the bed. Doris turned to Levine.

"The pack is going to war. Did you see their eyes shining in the street, and their mouths gloating? A new terror, eh?"

She threw her hands into her hair and her eyes centered suddenly on Lindstrum. He was standing over her. Doris began to laugh and to climb out of bed. She stood up barefooted in her night gown, her black hair down and pointed out of the window.

"Don't." Levine took her hand. "You'll catch cold."

Her eyes were lustrous. Lindstrum caught her in his arms. She had leaned toward him as if she were falling. Her body was vividly hot. He held her and she began to laugh.

"Better lie down," he whispered.

The laugh grew louder. Her hand with its fingers extended and pointing, wavered toward the window. She tried to talk but the laughter in her throat prevented. She hung loosely in his arms, laughing and waving her hands.

"The window," she gasped, "look out and see!"

"We had better get her into bed," Levine whispered. Lindstrum nodded. But Doris pulled herself from his hold. She stumbled and fell to her knees before the window. The room was dark and the street lights threw a faint glare over her face. She knelt with her hands to her neck and her eyes swinging.

"Look out!" cried Levine. Doris screamed.

"The beast . . . the beast!"

She had thrown herself forward with the shriek

but Lindstrum's hands had caught her. The window glass broke.

The two men carried her into the bed. Her head fell back on the pillow. She lay with her eyes open. Lindstrum sat leaning over her.

"Doris," he whispered. Her eyes regarded him without recognition.

"It's happened," muttered Levine. Lindstrum's hand passed over her forehead and slipped down the loose hair.

"The fever's gone," he said softly. "Yes," he repeated, "the fever's gone now."

Mrs. Basine returned. Doris, her eyes open, was lying as if dead. Her mother rushed to the bed crying her name. She was breathing. The fever was gone. Her body was almost cool.

"She was out of her head for a while," Lindstrum whispered.

"Talk to me please, dearest."

Doris sighed and looked around. They made no move as she sat up.

She left the bed and returned from a closet with a wrap over her nightgown. They watched her until her eyes turned toward them—expressionless, dead eyes. Mrs. Basine clasped her hands together and trembled.

"We must call the doctor at once," she whispered. She went to the telephone. Doris sat down in a chair near the window. Her head sank and she gazed out. The expressionless eyes grew clouded. Tears were coming out. She sat weeping without sound while her mother telephoned.

"Something has happened to Doris," Mrs. Basine whispered into the telephone, "please hurry, some-

thing has happened to her. . . ."

"Good-bye, Doris," Lindstrum spoke.

The white face of the girl remained without movement. She was staring out the window, a lifeless figure, weeping. He approached her and watched her tears.

Outside, he walked with his head down, through the streets.

"She knew it was going to happen," he murmured to himself, "and she wanted to see me again before it did." His heart felt heavy. Doris with her dead eyes weeping. Ah, a long sigh. Hard to remember things that had been.

"Knock 'em over," he whispered aloud. "Make something . . . make something." Deep inside him were hands that pantomimed despair. People in the streets. War was coming to them. "Huh," he said slowly, "they tore her heart out." Everybody knew him. Everybody knew the name Lindstrum. It was the name of a great poet. When he was dead Lindstrum would stay alive. "Huh," he whispered, "I don't know. . . . Sing to them. Yes. . . ."

His teeth bit into the pipe stem. Tears came from his eyes. He walked along in the night snarling with his lips parted, and weeping.

24

The war was a noisy guest. People shook hands with it. It sat down in their little rooms. It's voice was a brass band that drowned their troubles. Basine found a curious friend in the war.

Changes had come to him in the days that followed the scene with Ruth. He grew cold. His heart was

indifferent. His victory in the election had sent him to bed without joy.

There was no longer an inner Basine and an outer Basine. He had fought his way into the current of events and he was content to let them move him. They made him Senator. They moved him to Washington, provided new scenes for him, new faces. He heard of his sister's collapse without sorrow. She had become crazy. To be expected, of course, to be expected, he said to himself one evening as he sat writing a letter of sympathy to his mother.

The thing that had happened to Basine had been the result of a confusion. He found himself at forty robbed of life. Despair, hatred, disgust—these things were left. He turned his back on them. They were a company of emotions too difficult to play with. It was no longer possible to lie. Ruth, Schroder, Henrietta, love, hope, intrigue grew mixed up. He emerged from himself and walked away from himself like an aggrieved and dignified guest.

He sometimes remembered himself—a distant Basine. A keen-faced one with the feel of leadership in his heart. A mind that was alive behind its words. He had done and thought many things. But now he had gone away. He was silent. The day was no longer a challenge. The change carried its reward. It seemed to bring him closer to people. At least he found a certain charm in talking and listening that had not existed before.

He gave himself no thought. He was successful and that was enough. At times he sat in his new quarters in Washington reading stray items in the newspapers and reciting to himself his achievements.

He found pleasing identification in the honors he had achieved.

His political friends talked among themselves. They recalled that Basine had once been a man of promise, a man alive with energies. And now he was like the others in the party—an amiable fuddy-duddy. They recalled the sensational figure he had made a few years ago in the Vice Investigation. This seemed to have been the climax of Basine.

But the war arrived and the new Senator began to emerge. The country became filled with mediocrities struggling to utilize the war as a pedestal. The call had gone out for heroes and the elocutionists rushed forward.

The psychology of the day, however, was a bit too involved for these aspirants. The body politic of the nation found itself betrayed by its own platitudes. A moral frenzy began to animate the horizon. But it was the frenzy of an idea that had escaped control; an idea grown too huge and luminous to direct any longer. The idealization of itself before which the crowd had worshipped became now a Frankenstein. The virtues of America had gone to war. And the nation looked on, aghast and uncomprehending. The flattering and grandiose image of itself that the *bête populaire* had been creating in its law books, text books, and hymnals had suddenly stepped from its complicated mirror and was marching like a Mad Hatter to the front. A swarm of guides and interpreters had leaped to its side. They danced around it chanting its nobilities, proclaiming its grandeur. The spirit of Democracy, the Rights of Man, the One and Only God—the Golden Rule, the Thou Shalt Nots, the Seven Virtues, the Mann Act, the Hatred

for All Variants of Evil,—the mythical incarnation of these and kindred illusions—the Idealization—was off for the front.

The confusion arose when the nation found itself attached as if by some gruesome umbilical cord to this crazed Idealization, off with a Tin Sword on its shoulder. And it must follow this Virtue-snorting monster. It must lie down in trenches in behalf of a Fairy Tale with which it had been shrewdly deceiving itself for a century.

But while the elocutionists fumbling for pedestals were exhorting the nation to hoist itself by its bootstraps, to become overnight a belligerent hierarchy around its God, there were others whose spirit raised an authentic battle shout. One of these was Basine.

He appeared to return to himself. The Basine he had walked away from raised itself amid the disgusts and hatreds in which it had lain abandoned. A rage gathered in his voice. Eloquence and flashing eyes were his. The amiable fuddy-duddy playing little politics in Washington became a gentleman of war.

The horizon bristled with gentlemen of war. But the terrified crowd casting about for leaders, as the draft shovelled it toward the trenches, eyed them with suspicion. There must be authentic gentlemen of war —men above suspicion. Men maddened with a desire to fight and destroy were wanted. Basine was one of these. His tirades against the enemy left nothing in doubt. They were not concerned with idealisms. The enemy must be destroyed, he began to cry, or else it would destroy civilization.

Huns, he cried, vandals and scoundrels. Gorillas, demons, soulless monsters. His phrases drew frightful caricatures of the enemy. His orations were

among the few that stirred terror. The Germans were not enemies of an ideal—not a rabble of Nietzsches at theological grips with a rabble of Christs. They were Huns, said Basine, barbarians, fiends, hacking children to pieces, pillaging, raping, destroying.

This was a language the nation understood. It contained in it the inspiration to heroism and sacrifice. Out of it arose the grisly cartoon which awakened fear. Terrified by the possibilities of Hun domination and massacres, the crowd patriotically bared its bosom to the lesser horror—war. It marched forth behind its idiot Idealization not to defend that absurdity but to save itself from the clutches of massacring savages.

The energies which came to life abruptly in Basine focused into a strange passion against the Germans. He was vicious, intolerant, unscrupulous in his denunciations. This established him instantly as a leader.

The crowd, casting about for leaders, seized upon men more terrified than themselves. And upon these abject ones who raved and howled from the pulpit, stage and press, they heaped rewards and canonizations.

There was one phase of Basine's hatred that offered a curious explanation. From the beginning he devoted himself to describing the hideous immorality of the Huns. He loaned himself passionately to all rumors celebrating the wholesale rape of women committed by the invaders of Belgium. Deportations, well-poisonings, child-murders figured extensively in his eloquence. But gradually he appeared to concentrate upon what he called the ultimate horror—"fair Europe overrun by this horde of seducers and

immoral blackguards." Schroder was a German.

The war rehabilitated Basine. It enabled him to destroy Schroder. The complicated underworld of hate, disgust, disillusion which his ludicrous renunciation of Ruth and her subsequent betrayal by Schroder had created in him, was the arsenal from which he armed himself for war.

He had lapsed into a sterile and amiable Basine in order to escape from emotions become too intolerable and too dangerous to utilize. The murder of Schroder would not have restored him. The return of the woman he still loved would have been equally futile. Life had become too intolerable for Basine to face and adjust. He had permitted himself convenient burial.

On the night he had gotten drunk with the newspaperman, Basine saw himself as he was—a creature misshapen and humorous—and he had buried the vision and fled from it. To sit contemplating an inner self become a grotesque cripple was intolerable. He sought for a brief space to transfer his self-loathing to Schroder but Schroder, the man, was too small to contain it. Schroder, the war, however, was another matter.

Basine unlocked himself, exhumed himself, and came forth with a yell in his throat. The German army was five million Schroders. He hurled himself at them. He was happy in his rage. A sincerity hypnotized him.

The Germans were not only five million Schroders. They were also the incarnated nauseas and despairs of Basine. Schroder, the man, had become for him, illogically but soothingly, the cause of everything that had become misshapen and humorous inside him.

Schroder, the man, was the sand in which Basine, the ostrich, buried his head. Now Schroder, the Germans, Schroder, the World War, Schroder, the rape of Belgium, the devastation of France, offered a more hospitable grave for the misshapen and humorous image of himself. To destroy the Germans became for Basine synonymous with destroying the things inside himself from which he had fled helplessly. The destruction of these things consisted of giving them outlet, of giving them voice. His hatreds, despairs and disillusions arose and spat themselves upon the Germans. The process cleansed and invigorated him and launched him before the public as a leader to be trusted, a hero to venerate during its dark hour.

25

The company assembled in his mother's home greeted Basine with excitement. He had stopped over during a tour in behalf of the Liberty Loan. Mrs. Basine had persuaded him to attend a function in his honor. He was late. They were waiting dinner for him.

When he entered, a sense of great affairs, of world disturbances came into the room with him. At the table the talk centered around him. He was the superior patriot. Questions were fired at him—when would the war end, what was the real secret of this and that and did he know what was behind the latest note from the President, and when was the German offensive due? He answered ambiguously, offering no information and exciting his audience by his reticence.

Aubrey Gilchrist, who had held the floor before

the Senator's arrival, listened eagerly to his brother-in-law. Aubrey's patriotism was a bond between them. But it was of a different quality. Aubrey's patriotism was founded on the fact that America was the most virtuous nation in the world. He devoted himself to a campaign among his friends and had even spoken publicly a number of times. In his talk he grew eloquent over the moral grandeur of his country and hailed the altruism and honesty of his countrymen as a light that illumined the world.

Aubrey had overcome his impulse to publish his father's manuscript under his own name. His fears had finally triumphed. He had utilized his decision in a curious way. For months after determining not to commit the imposture he had discussed the decision among his friends.

"I worked a number of years on it," he explained simply, "but on reading it over I feel that it's not the thing to be given the public. It's a bit too Rabelaisian and unrestrained. Among gentlemen, yes. But when one thinks of young men and women reading such things one hesitates. I feel too that I can do better. Perhaps in another year or so I'll finish something more worthy."

This explanation had given him a pleasurable emotion. It had coincided with the inner Aubrey—the Isaiah who thundered in secret. He had gone about elated with the knowledge of his honesty—not only the honesty of refraining from the imposture but the honesty of sparing the public a work likely to undermine its morals. With the advent of the war Aubrey's elation had expanded miraculously. The nation became a collection of Aubrey Gilchrists. He found an outlet for his self admiration in boasting tirelessly

of the virtues of his countrymen. His interest in the Germans was faint. He was chiefly concerned with having the moral grandeur of his nation recognized and triumphant.

Seated opposite him was Fanny. She smiled when he looked at her. The war had brought Fanny happiness. It had released her from the tormenting of Ramsey. She turned occasionally toward Ramsey a few seats removed at the table and spoke to him. He had changed. He sat flushed and elated and took his turn at denouncing the enemy, at avowing vengeance and prophesying terrible victories over the Hun. His anger rivalled Basine's. The curious game he had played with Fanny had lost its interest. He had emerged like Basine. Fanny was no longer necessary to his desire for a sense of power—a power which convinced him of his manliness and concealed from him the secret of his inferiority. He had transferred his game from Fanny to the Germans. He was now tormenting the Germans. The news of their defeats, the hope of their annihilation inflated him. In addition, his belligerent air, his gory threats enabled him to establish himself in his eyes and in the eyes of others as a thorough man.

There were others in the company—Judge Smith, red-faced and glowering; Aubrey's mother engaged in excommunicating the Germans as socially unfit and outside the pale of her sympathy or support; a number of prominent social and political lights. They discussed the war with animation, fired questions at the senator and ate heartily.

Dishes clattered. Servants appeared and disappeared. Mrs. Basine, sitting beside her son listened to him proudly and grew sad. Her son's prestige

pleased her. But the war saddened her. She noticed that Mrs. Gilchrist was growing old—too old to share the enthusiasms of the day. Yet there was a comradeship in the room that stirred Mrs. Basine. She disliked most of the individuals around her. But when they came together there was something charming in the way they talked and smiled and exchanged confidences.

Mrs. Basine had secretly allied herself with a pacifist group of women who labelled their minor timidity as intellectualism and argued with violence against the major timidity identified as patriotism. She had a horror of war, her imagination seeing herself continually suffering with the soldiers of both sides. A similar sensitiveness had converted her into a vague socialist. The misery of what she called the masses was a mirror in which she saw a possible image of herself. She subscribed with enthusiasm to doctrines which promised to establish justice and tranquility in the world.

But now among the people in her home Mrs. Basine noticed an enviable optimism. Some of them were old friends, others new friends. But all of them were alike in one way. All of them seemed wonderfully excited over the fact that this war was going to put an end to all wars. She would have liked to share this optimism. But her intelligence deprived her of the solace. Yet she was able to feel kindly toward the ideals she sensed were false. They were somehow like her own ideals—inspired by similar things.

The camaraderie in the room heightened. This was a war that was going to put an end to all wars and everyone felt happy. They talked and laughed.

Their manner seemed to hint that the war was not only going to put an end to all wars but to all troubles. Yes, the Germans vanquished, victory achieved, and the world would be beautifully straightened out.

They identified themselves avidly with the world—these old and new friends. The enemy who had dogged their monotonous little footsteps through the years—the veiled Nemesis who had harassed them and filled them with helpless, futile hatreds, tripped them up and robbed them at every turn—this enemy was at last unmasked. He was identified now. He was their troubles—their defeats. And they had him out in the open now where they could shout battle cries and leap upon him. He was the Germans.

Mrs. Basine, groping for an understanding of the elation among her guests and desiring to share it, thought of her grandchildren. She remembered George when he was no older than his son. This memory seemed to give the lie to the excitement in the room. She wondered why. She remembered Fanny when she was a girl. And Henrietta long ago. Henrietta was smiling quietly at her husband—a faded matron, scrawny, silent. And Doris was upstairs, weeping perhaps. She had taken Doris out of the sanitarium to care for her at home. The doctor said melancholia. She might be cured if something could be found to interest her. But there was nothing. She sat wide-eyed and morose through the day, her hands listless and waited till night came and sleep. Her skin was yellow and there were little glints in her eyes as if they were peering out of the dark.

Senator Basine laughed at the sally of a pretty woman. The table joined his laughter. The senator

was an inspiration. His manner was forceful, his words direct. When he listened his head remained flung back. When he talked he lowered his head and raised his eyes. There was an anger in him that awed. It played behind his words.

"You're right, George." Aubrey answered a remark Basine had made. "I agree with you entirely. But after all, the purposes of this war are more than victory over an enemy. The victory over ourselves—"

Aubrey's words were lost in the racket of rising diners. The eating was over. The guests filed into the library. Henrietta slipped her hand through her husband's arm. She remembered vaguely the afternoon in the Basine library when George Basine had asked her to marry him. No,—it was in the kitchen. She would have liked to talk about it. But this was no time to mention such things. She sat down and listened to the excited remarks of the guests. There was an interruption. Aubrey, at the window, raised his voice.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "soldiers."

The company crowded to the front of the room. Men in civilian clothes carrying small bundles over their shoulders were marching four abreast down the center of the street.

"Entraining for war, by God!" said Ramsey.

They watched in silence. Soldiers going to war! There was something incongruous about that. A vague feeling of surprise and discomfort held the watchers. Men who would in a short time be lying in trenches, shooting with guns, killing other men. And they felt curiously out of touch with the marchers, as if the enemy they had been denouncing

at the table and vilifying throughout their day were someone not so far away as France. As if these marching men in the street were being sent to the wrong address.

26

Basine hurried in the dark street. His mother and Henrietta stood in the doorway watching him. He carried a suitcase and had promised to write frequently. The Liberty Loan tour had cut short his visit. He was walking to catch his train at the neighborhood station a few blocks away.

As he turned the corner, Basine paused. Someone had called his name. He looked around and saw a man standing under the street lamp.

"Hello George. How are you?"

The man held out his hand and Basine, taking it, studied him for a moment. Keegan. Poor old Hugh Keegan. Basine smiled.

"Well, well," he exclaimed. "What are you doing around here, Hugh?"

They stood shaking hands. Basine noticed the furtive, shabby air of his old friend. He hadn't seen or heard of Keegan or thought of him for years. It was strange to meet him like this, walking in a street.

"I live down the street a ways," Keegan answered. An almost womanish shyness was in his manner. "Been hearing and reading a lot about you, George." He lowered his voice. "You sure made good."

Basine smiled deprecatingly.

"Walking my way, Hugh?" he inquired. "Going to the train." He felt nervous. Keegan was like meeting yesterdays.

"Yes," said Keegan.

They walked along. Basine felt his exhuberance leaving him. A curious desire to apologize to Keegan took hold of him. But for what? Because Keegan looked shabby. Keegan acted frightened and ashamed of something.

"We used to have some good times together, George."

The man was impossibly wistful. Like a beggar asking something—demanding something.

"Yes," said Basine. This Keegan . . . this Keegan. He looked at him out of the corners of his eyes. Shabby, furtive, blond-faced, tired.

"What have you been doing, Hugh?" he asked.

"Oh, didn't you hear," Keegan answered. His voice grew more deferential. He began to talk in an apologetic murmur.

"My wife died," he apologized. "I got married, you know, four years ago. Four years this coming November. We went to a picnic last June and Helen ate something."

Keegan's voice sank to a confidential and still apologetic whisper.

"About two nights after," he added, "she died."

Basine looked at him and saw tears in his eyes. Keegan had married somebody and she had died. This had happened to Keegan. Basine grew nervous.

"Awf'ly glad to have seen you again, Hugh," he said after a pause. "Am sorry to hear about it. We must get together sometime. I think I'll have to run."

They shook hands and Basine hurried on. He was aware of Keegan looking after him. A vacuous-faced Keegan with tears in his eyes. A Keegan who