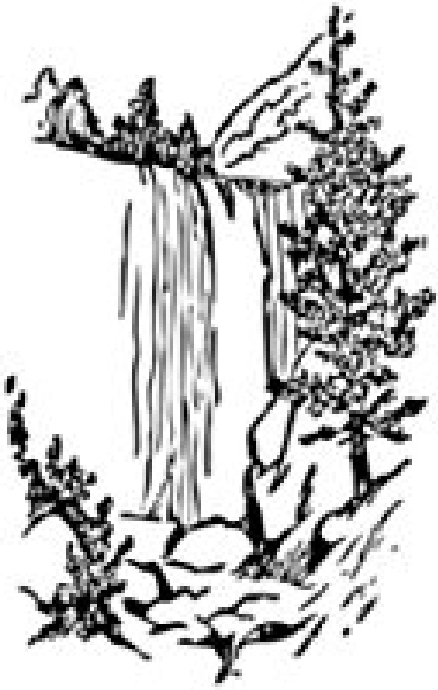
The Guarded Heights



Charles Wadsworth Camp

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THE GUARDED HEIGHTS ***

THE GUARDED HEIGHTS

BY WADSWORTH CAMP

**FRONTISPIECE
BY C. D. MITCHELL**

**GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO
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"GEORGE WATCHED SYLVIA LIFT HER RIDING CROP, HER FACE DISCLOSING A TEMPER TO MATCH HIS OWN"

CONTENTS

PART I OAKMONT
PART II PRINCETON
PART III THE MARKET-PLACE
PART IV THE FOREST
PART V THE NEW WORLD

Books by Wadsworth Camp

THE GUARDED HEIGHTS

PART I

OAKMONT

I

George Morton never could be certain when he first conceived the preposterous idea that Sylvia Planter ought to belong to him. The full realization, at any rate, came all at once, unexpectedly, destroying his dreary outlook, urging him to fantastic heights, and, for that matter, to rather curious depths.

It was, altogether, a year of violent change. After a precarious survival of a rural education he had done his best to save his father's livery business which cheap automobiles had persistently undermined. He liked that, for he had spent his vacations, all his spare hours, indeed, at the stable or on the road, so that by the time the crash came he knew more of horses and rode better than any hunting, polo-playing gentleman he had ever seen about that rich countryside. Nor was there any one near his own age who could stand up to him in a rough-and-tumble argument. Yet he wondered why he was restless, not appreciating that he craved broader worlds to conquer. Then the failure came, and his close relation with the vast Planter estate of Oakmont, and the arrival of Sylvia, who disclosed such worlds and heralded the revolution.

That spring of his twentieth year the stable and all its stock went to the creditors, and old Planter bought the small frame house just outside the village, on the

edge of his estate, and drew his boundary around it. He was willing that the Mortons should remain for the present in their old home at a nominal rent, and after a fashion they might struggle along, for George's mother was exceptionally clever at cleansing fine laces and linens; the estate would have work for his father from time to time; as for himself, Planter's superintendent suggested, there were new and difficult horses at Oakmont and a scarcity of trustworthy grooms. George shook his head.

"Sure, I want a job," he admitted, "but not as old Planter's servant, or anybody else's. I want to be my own boss."

George hadn't guessed that his reputation as a horseman had travelled as far as the big house. The superintendent explained that it had, and that, living at home, merely helping out for the summer, he would be quite apart from the ordinary men around the stables. His parents sensed a threat. They begged him to accept.

"We've got to do as Old Planter wants at the start or he'll put us out, and we're too old to make another home."

So George went with his head up, telling himself he was doing Planter a favour; but he didn't like it, and almost at once commenced to plan to get away, if he could, without hurting his parents. Then Sylvia, just home from her last year at school, came into the stable toward the end of his day's work. Her overpowering father was with her, and her brother, Lambert, who was about George's age. She examined interestedly the horse reserved for her, and one or two others of which she was envious.

George wanted to stare at her. He had only glimpsed her casually and at a distance in summers gone by. Now she was close, and he knew he had never seen anything to match her slender, adolescent figure, or her finely balanced face with its intolerant eyes and its frame of black hair.

"But," he heard her say to her father in a flexible contralto voice, "I don't care to bother you or Lambert every time I want to ride."

An argument, unintelligible to George, flowed for a moment. Then Old Planter's tones, bass and authoritative, filled the stable.

"Come here, young Morton!"

George advanced, not touching his cap, to remind the big man that there was a difference between him and the other stable men, and that he didn't like that tone.

"You are a very dependable horseman," the great millionaire said. "I can trust you. When Miss Sylvia wants to ride alone you will go with her and see that she has no accidents. During your hours here you will be entirely at her disposal."

Instead of arousing George's anger that command slightly thrilled him.

"So you're Morton," Sylvia said, indifferently. "I shall expect you always to be convenient."

He ventured to look at last, pulling off his cap.

"You can depend on it," he said, a trifle dazed by her beauty.

She went out. Her father and her brother followed,

like servitors of a sort themselves. George had no sense of having allowed his position there to be compromised. He only realized that he was going to see that lovely creature every day, would be responsible for her safety, would have a chance to know her.

"A peach!" a groom whispered. "You're lucky, Georgie boy."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe so."

Yet he agreed. She was a peach, and he took no pains to conceal his appraisal from his parents that evening.

"Seen Old Planter's daughter yet?"

His father, a drooping, tired figure in the dusk of the little porch, nodded.

"I haven't," his mother called from the kitchen. "Is she as pretty as she was last summer?"

"Pretty!" he scoffed. "Who was the prettiest woman in the world?"

"I don't know," came the interested voice from the house. "Maybe the Queen of Sheba."

"Then," George said, "she'd have cried her eyes out if she had seen Old Planter's girl."

The elder Morton took his pipe from his mouth.

"Young men like you," he said, slowly, "haven't any business looking at girls like Old Planter's daughter."

George laughed carelessly.

"Even a cat can look at a queen."

And during the weeks that followed he did look, too persistently, never dreaming where his enthusiasm was leading him. Occasionally he would bring her brother's horse around with hers or her father's. At such times he would watch them ride away with a keen disappointment, as if he had been excluded from a pleasure that had become his right. Lambert, however, was away a good deal, and Old Planter that summer fought rheumatic attacks, which he called gout, so that Sylvia, for the most part, rode alone through remote bridle-paths with George at her heels like a well-trained animal.

He knew he could not alter that all at once; she would have it no other way. She only spoke to him, really, about the condition of the horses, or the weather—never a word conceivably personal; and every day he looked at her more personally, let his imagination, without knowing it, stray too far. At first he merely enjoyed being with her; then he appreciated that a sense of intimacy had grown upon him, and he was troubled that she did not reciprocate, that their extended companionship had not diminished at all the appalling distance dividing them. There was something, moreover, beyond her beauty to stimulate his interest. She appeared not to know fear, and once or twice he ventured to reprove her, enjoying her angry reactions. She even came to the stables, urging him to let her ride horses that he knew were not safe.

"But you ride them," she would persist.

"When I find a horse I can't ride, Miss Sylvia, I guess I'll have to take up a new line. If your father would come and say it's all right——"

Even then he failed to grasp the fact that he guarded her for his own sake rather more than for her father's.

He nearly interfered when he heard her cry to her brother as they started off one morning:

"I'm going to ride harder from now on, Lambert. I've got to get fit for next winter. Coming out will take a lot of doing."

"If she rides any harder," he muttered, "she'll break her silly neck."

It angered him that she never spoke to him in that voice, with that easy manner. Perhaps his eagerness to be near her had led her to undervalue him. Somehow he would change all that, and he wanted her to stop calling him "Morton," as if he had been an ordinary groom, or an animal, but he would have to go slowly. Although he didn't realize the great fact then, he did know that he shrank from attempting anything that would take her away from him.

It was her harder riding, indeed, that opened his eyes, that ushered in the revolution.

It happened toward the close of a mid-July afternoon. Mud whirled from her horse's hoofs, plentifully sprinkling her humble guardian.

"Now what the devil's she up to?" he thought with a sharp fear.

She turned and rode at a gallop for a hedge, an uneven, thorny barrier that separated two low meadows. He put spurs to his horse, shouting:

"Hold up, Miss Sylvia! That's a rotten take-off."

Flushed and laughing, she glanced over her shoulder.

"Got to try it to prove it, Morton."

He realized afterward that it was as near intimacy as she had ever come.

He saw her horse refuse, straightening his knees and sliding in the marshy ground. He watched Sylvia, with an ease and grace nearly unbelievable, somersault across the hedge and out of sight in the meadow beyond.

"Miss Sylvia! Are you hurt?"

No answer. He sprang from his horse, leaving it free to graze with hers. He stormed through the hedge, his heart choking him. She lay on her side, quite motionless, the high colour fled from her cheeks, her hair half down. Although the soft ground should have reassured him he was obsessed by the thought that she might never get up again.

In the warmth of his fear barriers were consumed. Within his horizon survived just two people, himself and this silent object of an extended, if unconscious, adoration.

He shrank from learning the truth, yet it was impossible to hesitate. He had to do what he could.

He approached on tip-toe, knelt, and lifted her until she rested against him. The contact was galvanic. He became aware of his trembling hands. Some man, it occurred to him, would touch those curved, slightly parted lips. Not if he knew it, unless it were himself! He wanted to hear those lips speak to him as if he were a human being, and not just—Morton. How could he dream of such things now? He fumbled for

her pulse, failed at first to find it, and became panic-stricken. He shook her, more than ever alone, facing an irretrievable loss.

"Open your eyes," he begged wildly. "What's the matter with you? Oh, my God, Miss Sylvia, I can't ever get along without you now."

He glanced haggardly around for water, any means to snatch her back; then she stirred in his arms, and with his relief came a sickening return to a peopled and ordered world. He understood he had sprung headlong with his eyes shut; that his anxiety had dictated phrases he had had no business to form, that he would not have uttered if she had been able to hear. Or, good Lord! Had she heard? For she drew herself convulsively away, the colour rushing back, her eyes opening, and they held a sort of horror.

"Are you hurt?" he said, trying to read her eyes.

She got to her knees, swaying a trifle.

"I remember. A bit of a fall. Stunned me. That's all. But you said something, Morton! Will you please repeat that?"

Her eyes, and her voice, which had a new, frightening quality, stung his quick temper. What he had suffered a moment ago was a little sacred. He couldn't afford to let her cheapen it one cent's worth.

"I guess I don't need to repeat it," he said. "It was scared out of me, Miss Sylvia, because I thought—I know it was silly—but I thought you were dead. I never dreamed you could hear. I'll try to forget it."

He saw her grope in the wet grass at her knees. Scarcely understanding, he watched her rise, lifting

her riding crop, her face disclosing a temper to match his own.

"You're an impertinent servant," she said. "Well, you'll not forget."

She struck at his face with the crop. He got his hand up just in time, and caught her wrist.

"Don't you touch me," she whispered.

His jaw went out.

"You'll learn not to be afraid of my touch, and I'm not a servant. You get that straight."

She struggled, but he held her wrist firmly. The sight of the crop, the memory of her epithet, thickened his voice, lashed his anger.

"Have it your own way. You say I shan't forget, and I won't. I'm going after you, and I usually get what I go after. You'll find I'm a human being, and I'd like to see anybody hit me in the face and get away with it."

"Let me go! Let me go!"

He released her wrist, dragging the crop from her grasp. He snapped it in two and flung the pieces aside. The slight noise steadied him. It seemed symbolic of the snapping of his intended fate. She drew slowly back, chafing the wrist he had held. Her face let escape the desire to hurt, to hurt hard.

"Someone else will have the strength," she whispered. "You'll be punished, you—you—stable boy."

She forced her way blindly through the hedge. Responding to his custom he started automatically

after her to hold her stirrup. She faced him, raising her hands.

"Keep away from me, you beast!"

Unaided, she sprang into her saddle and started home at a hard gallop.

George glanced around thoughtfully. He was quite calm now. The familiar landscape appeared strangely distorted. Was that his temper, or a reflection from his altered destiny? He didn't know how the deuce he could do it, but he was going to justify himself. Maybe the real situation had never been explained to her, and, as the price of her companionship, he had, perhaps, let her hold him too cheaply; but now he was going to show her that he was, indeed, instead of a servant, a human being, capable of making his boasts good.

He picked up the two pieces of her riding crop and thrust them into his pocket. They impressed him as a necessary souvenir of his humiliation, a reminder of what he had to do. She had hurt. Oh, Lord! How she had hurt! He experienced a hot desire to hurt back. The scar could only be healed, he told himself, if some day he could strike at her beautiful, contemptuous body as hard as she had just now struck at him.

II

He mounted and pressed his horse, but he had only one or two glimpses of Sylvia, far ahead, using her spurs, from time to time raising her hand as if she had forgotten that her crop had been torn from her, broken, and thrown aside.

Such frantic haste was urged by more than the necessity of escape. What then, if not to hasten his punishment, to tell her father, her mother, and Lambert? She had threatened that someone else would have the strength to give him a thrashing. Probably Lambert. Aside from that how could they punish a man who had only committed the crime of letting a girl know that he loved her? All at once he guessed, and he laughed aloud. They could kick him out. He wanted, above everything else, to be kicked out of a job where he was treated like a lackey, although he was told he was nothing of the kind. Expert with horses, doing Old Planter a favour for the summer! Hadn't she just called him a servant, a stable boy? He wanted to put himself forever beyond the possibility of being humiliated in just that way again.

In the stable he found a groom leading Sylvia's horse to a stall.

"Take mine, too, and rub him down, will you?"

The groom turned, staring.

"The nerve! What's up, George?"

"Only," George said, deliberately, "that I've touched my last horse for money."

"Say! What goes on here? The young missus rides in like a cyclone, and looking as if she'd been crying. I always said you'd get in trouble with the boss's daughter. You're too good looking for the ladies, Georgie——"

"That's enough of that," George snapped. "Scrape him down, and I'll be much obliged."

He went out, knowing that the other would obey, for as a rule people did what George wanted. He took a path through the park toward home, walking slowly, commencing to appreciate the difficulties he had brought upon himself. His predicament might easily involve his parents. The afternoon was about done, they would both be there, unsuspecting. It was his duty to prepare them. He experienced a bitter regret as he crossed the line that a few months ago had divided their property, their castle, from Oakmont. Now Old Planter could cross that line and drive them out.

Before George came in sight of the house he heard a rubbing, slapping noise, and with a new distaste pictured his mother bending over a washtub, suggesting a different barrier to be leaped. As he entered the open space back of the house he wanted to kick the tub over, wanted to see sprawling in the dirt the delicate, intimate linen sent down weekly from the great house because his mother was exceptionally clever with such things. To the uncouth music of her labour her broad back rose and bent rhythmically. His father, wearing soiled clothing, sat on the porch steps, an old briar pipe in his mouth.

Abruptly his mother's drudgery ceased. She stared. His father rose stiffly.

"You've got yourself in trouble," he said.

George had not fancied the revolution had unfurled banners so easily discernible. He became self-conscious. His parents' apprehension made matters more difficult for him. They, at least, were too old to revolt.

"I suppose I have," he acknowledged shortly.

His father used the tone of one announcing an unspeakable catastrophe.

"You mean you've had trouble with Miss Sylvia."

"George!" his mother cried, aghast. "You've never been impertinent with Miss Sylvia!"

"She thinks I have," George said, "so it amounts to the same thing."

His father's face twitched.

"And you know Old Planter can put us out of here without a minute's notice, and where do you think we'd go? How do you think we'd get bread and butter? You talk up, young man. You tell us what happened."

"I can't," George said, sullenly. "I can't talk about it. You'll hear soon enough."

"I always said," his mother lamented, "that Georgie wasn't one to know his place up there."

"Depends," George muttered, "on what my place is. I've got to find that out. Look! You'll hear now."

A bald-headed figure in livery, one of the house servants, glided toward them through the shrubbery, over that vanished boundary line, with nervous haste. George squared his shoulders. The messenger, however, went straight to the older man.

"Mr. Planter's on his ear, and wants to see you right off in the library. What you been up to, young Morton?"

George resented the curiosity in the pallid,

unintelligent eyes, the fellow's obvious pleasure in the presence of disaster. It would have appeased him to grasp those sloping shoulders, to force the grinning face from his sight. A queer question disturbed him. Had Sylvia felt something of the sort about him?

"Come on," the elder Morton said. "It's pretty hard at my age. You'll pay for this, George."

"Old Planter would never be that unfair," George encouraged him.

"Georgie! Georgie!" his mother said when the others were out of sight, "what have you been up to?"

He walked closer and placed his arm around her shoulders.

"I've been getting my eyes opened," he answered. "I never ought to have listened to them. I never ought to have gone up there. I did say something to Miss Sylvia I had no business to. If I'd been one of her own kind, instead of the son of a livery stable keeper, I'd have got polite regrets or something. It's made me realize how low I am."

"No," she said with quick maternal passion. "You're not low. Maybe some day those people'll be no better than we are."

He shook his head.

"I'd rather I was no worse than they are. And I will be. I won't put up with it. If some people have to be treated like dirt, I'm going to help do the treating."

"That's no right way of thinking," she warned. "It's money makes the mare go."

But in Sylvia's case, George admitted, there was other propulsion than that; something more fragile, and harder to understand or capture for one's self.

"Don't you worry, I'll make money," he said.

She glanced up quickly.

"Who's that?"

A brisk masculine voice volleyed through the shrubbery:

"Young Morton! I say, young Morton!"

"It's Mr. Lambert," she breathed. "Go quick."

George remembered what Sylvia had said about someone else having the strength.

"Can't you guess, Ma, what the young lady's brother wants of me?"

The bitterness left his face. His smile was engaging.

"To give me the devil."

"Young Morton! Young Morton!"

"Coming!" he called.

"George," she begged, "don't have any trouble with Mr. Lambert."

III

She watched him with anxious eyes, failing to observe, because she was his mother, details that informed his boasts with power. His ancestry of labour had given him, at least, his straight, slender, and unusually muscular body, and from somewhere

had crept in the pride, just now stimulated, with which he carried it. His wilful, regular features, moreover, guarded by youth, were still uncoarsened.

He found Lambert Planter waiting beyond the old boundary behind a screen of bushes, his hands held behind his back. In his face, which had some of Sylvia's beauty, hardened and enlarged, dwelt the devil George had foreseen.

George nodded, feeling all at once at ease. He could take care of himself in an argument with Lambert Planter. No such distances separated them as had widened beyond measure a little while back between him and Sylvia. He wondered if that conception sprang from Lambert, or if it came simply from the fact that they were two men, facing each other alone; for it was from the first patent that Sylvia had asked her brother to complete a punishment she had devised as fitting, but which she had been incapable of carrying out herself. Lambert, indeed, brought his hands forward, disclosing a whip. It was a trifle in his way as he took off his coat.

"That's right," George said. "Make yourself comfortable."

"You won't help matters by being impertinent, Morton."

Lambert's voice contrasted broadly with George's round, loud tones. While, perhaps, not consciously affected, its accents fell according to the custom of the head master of a small and particular preparatory school. George crushed his instinct to mock. What the deuce had he craved ever since his encounter with Sylvia unless it was to be one with men like Lambert Planter? So all he said was:

"What's the whip for?"

"You know perfectly well," Lambert answered. "There's no possible excuse for what you said and did this afternoon. I am going to impress that on you."

"You mean you want a fight?"

"By no means. I wouldn't feel comfortable fighting a man like you. I'd never dreamed we had such a rotten person on the place. Oh, no, Morton. I'm going to give you a good horse-whipping."

George's chin went out. His momentary good-humour fled.

"If you touch me with that whip I'm likely to kill you."

Without hesitating Lambert raised the whip. George sprang and got his hands on it, intent only on avoiding a blow that would have carried the same unbearable sting as Sylvia's riding crop. Such tactics took Lambert by surprise. George's two hands against his one on the stock were victorious. The whip flew to one side. Lambert, flushing angrily, started after it. George barred his path, raising his fists.

"You don't touch that thing again."

Lambert's indecision, his hands hanging at his sides, hurt George nearly as much as the lashing would have done. He had to destroy that attitude of sheer superiority.

"I'm not sure you're a man," he said, thickly, "but you tried to hit me, so you can put your pretty hands up or take it in the face."

He aimed a vicious blow. Lambert side-stepped and

countered. George's ear rang. He laughed, his self-respect rushing back with the keen joy of battle. In Lambert's face, stripped of its habitual repression, he recognized an equal excitement. It was a man's fight, with blood drawn at the first moment, staining both of them. Lambert boxed skillfully, and his muscles were hard, but after the first moment George saw victory, and set out to force it. He looked for fear in the other's eyes then, and longed to see it, but those eyes remained as unafraid as Sylvia's until there wasn't left in them much of anything conscious. As a last chance Lambert clinched, and they went down, fighting like a pair of furious terriers. George grinned as he felt those eclectic hands endeavouring in the most brotherly fashion to torture him. He managed to pin them to the ground. He laughed happily.

"Thought you hated to touch me."

"You fight like a tiger, anyway," Lambert gasped.

"Had enough?"

Lambert nodded.

"I know when I'm through."

George didn't release him at once. His soul expanded with a sense of power and authority earned by his own effort. It seemed an omen. It urged him too far.

"Then," he mused, "I guess I'd better let you run home and tell your father what I've done to you."

"That," Lambert said, "proves I was right, and I'm sorry I fought you."

George tried to think. He felt hot and angry. Was the other, after all, the better man?

"I take it back," he muttered. "Ought to have had enough sense to know that a fellow that fights like you's no tattle-tale."

"Thanks, Morton."

George's sense of power grew. He couldn't commence too soon to use it.

"See here, Mr. Planter, I came up here to help with some horses your people didn't know how to handle, and let myself get shifted to this other job; but I'm not your father's slave, and anyway I'm getting out."

He increased the pressure on Lambert's arms.

"Just to remind you what we've been fighting about, and that I'm not your slave, you call me Mr. Morton, or George, just as if I was about as good as you."

Lambert smiled broadly.

"Will you kindly let me go—George?"

George sprang up, grinning.

"How you feel, Mr. Lam——" He caught himself —"Mr. Planter?"

Lambert struggled to his feet.

"Quite unwell, thanks. I'm sorry you made such a damned fool of yourself this afternoon. We might have had some pretty useful times boxing together."

"I'd just as leave tell you," George said, glancing away, "that I never intended to say it. I didn't realize it myself until it was scared out of me."

Lambert put on his coat.

"It won't bear talking about."

"It never hit me," George said, huskily, "that even a cat couldn't look at a queen."

"Perfectly possible," Lambert said as he walked off, feeling his bruises, "only the queen mustn't see the cat."

IV

George went, obliterating as best he could the souvenirs of battle. Water, unfortunately, was a requisite, and the nearest was to be found at his own home. His mother gasped.

"You did! After what I said!"

At the pump he splashed cold water over his face and arms.

"I thrashed him," he spluttered.

"I guess that settles it for your father and me."

"Young Planter won't tell anybody," George assured her. "Although I don't see how he's going to get away with it unless he says he was run over by an automobile and kicked by a mule."

"What's come over you?" she demanded. "You've gone out of your head."

He dodged her desire for details. As Lambert had said, the thing wouldn't bear talking about. For the first time in his life he stood alone, and whatever he accomplished from now on would have to be done alone.

He saw his father striding toward them, the anxious

light gone from his eyes. George experienced a vast relief.

"Father looks a little more cheerful," he commented, drying his face.

"Get supper, Ma," the man said as he came up.

She hesitated, held by her curiosity, while he turned on George.

"I don't wonder you couldn't open your mouth to me. You're to be out of here to-morrow."

"I'd made up my mind to that."

"And Old Planter wants to see you at nine o'clock to-night."

"Since you and Ma," George said, "seem on such good terms with him I suppose I'll have to go."

"Thank the Lord we are," his father grumbled. "I wouldn't have blamed him if he had packed us all off. He was more than fair. I've looked after you so far, but you'll have to shift for yourself now."

"And the only thing I didn't like about it," George mused, "was leaving you and Ma."

"What did he say to Miss Sylvia?" his mother whispered.

"Said he couldn't get along without her, and was going to have her."

He might have been speaking of one who had ventured to impersonate the deity.

"And he touched her! Put his arms around her!"

The horror in his mother's face grew.

"Georgie! Georgie! What could you have been thinking of?"

He leaned against the pump.

"I'm thinking now," he said, softly, "it's sort of queer a man's father and mother believe there's any girl in the world too good for their son."

"Lots of them," his father snapped. "Sylvia Planter most of all."

"Oh, yes," his mother agreed.

He straightened.

"Then listen," he said, peremptorily. "I don't think so. I told her I was going to have her, and I will. Just put that down in your books. I'll show the lot of you that I'm as good as she is, as good as anybody."

The late sun illuminated the purpose in his striking face.

"Impertinent servant!" he cried. "Stable boy! Beast! It's pretty rough to make her marry all that. It's my only business from now on."

V

He went to his room, leaving his parents aghast. With a nervous hurry he rid himself of his riding breeches, his puttees, his stock.

"That," he told himself, "is the last time I shall ever wear anything like livery."

When he had dressed in one of his two suits of

ordinary clothing he took the broken riding crop and for a long time stared at it as though the venomous souvenir could fix his resolution more firmly. Once his hand slipped to the stock where Sylvia's fingers had so frequently tightened. He snatched his hand away. It was too much like an unfair advantage, a stolen caress.

"Georgie! Georgie!"

His mother's voice drifted to him tentatively.

"Come and get your supper."

He hid the broken crop and went out. His father glanced disapproval.

"You'd do better to wear Old Planter's clothes while you can. It's doubtful when you'll buy any more of your own."

George sat down without answering. Since his return from the ride that afternoon his parents and he had scarcely spoken the same language, and by this time he understood there was no possible interpreter. It made him choke a little over his food.

The others were content to share his silence. His father seemed only anxious to have him away; but his mother, he fancied, looked at him with something like sorrow.

Afterward he fled from that nearly voiceless scrutiny and paced one of the park paths, counting the minutes until he could answer Old Planter's summons. He desired to have the interview over so that he could snap every chain binding him to Oakmont, every chain save the single one Sylvia's contempt had unwittingly forged. He could not,

moreover, plan his immediate future with any assurance until he knew what the great man wanted.

"Only to make me feel a little worse," he decided. "What else could he do?"

What, indeed, could a man of Planter's wealth and authority not do? It was a disturbing question.

Through the shrubbery the lights of the house gleamed. The moonlight outlined the immense, luxurious mass. Never once had he entered the great house. He was eager to study the surrounding in which women like Sylvia lived, which she, to an extent, must reflect.

In that serene moonlight he realized that his departure, agreeable and essential as it was, would make it impossible for him during an indefinite period to see that slender, adolescent figure, or the features, lovely and intolerant, that had brought about this revolution in his life. He acknowledged now that he had looked forward each day to those hours of proximity and contemplation; and there had been from the first, he guessed, adoration in his regard.

It was no time to dwell on the sentimental phase of his situation. He despised himself for still loving her. His approaching departure he must accept gladly, since he designed it as a means of coming closer—close enough to hurt.

He wondered if he would have one more glimpse of her, perhaps in the house. He glanced at his watch. He could go at last. He started for the lights. Would he see her?

At the corner of the building he hesitated before a

fresh dilemma. His logical entrance lay through the servants' quarters, but he squared his shoulders and crossed the terrace. It was impossible now that he should ever enter the house in which she lived by the back door.

It was a warm night, so the door stood open. The broad spaces of the hall, the rugs, the hangings, the huge chairs, the portraits in gilt frames against polished walls, the soft, rosy light whose source he failed to explore, seemed mutely to reprove his presumption.

He rang. He did not hear the feet of the servant who answered. The vapid man that had trotted for his father that afternoon suddenly shut off his view.

"You must wear rubbers," George said.

"What you doing here? Go 'round to the back."

"Mr. Planter," George explained, patiently, "sent for me."

"All right. All right. Then go 'round to the back where you belong."

George reached out, caught the other's shoulder, and shoved him to one side. While the servant gave a little cry and struggled to regain his balance, George walked in. A figure emerged painfully from an easy chair in the shadows by the fireplace.

"What's all this, Simpson?"

The polished voice gave the impression of overcoming an impediment, probably a swollen lip.

"It's young Morton, Mr. Lambert," Simpson whined. "I told him to go to the back door where he belongs."

"What an idea!" Lambert drawled. "Enter, Mr. Morton. My dear Mr. Morton, what is the occasion? What can we do for you? I must beg you to excuse my appearance. I had a trifling argument with my new hunter this afternoon."

George grinned.

"Must be some horse."

None the less, he felt a bruise. It would have been balm to destroy Lambert's mocking manner by a brusque attack even in this impressive hall.

"Your father sent for me."

"Shall I put him out, sir?" Simpson quavered.

Lambert burst into a laugh.

"I shouldn't try it. We can't afford too many losses in one day. Go away, Simpson, and don't argue with your betters. You might not be as clever as I at explaining the visible results. I'll take care of Mr. Morton."

Simpson was bewildered.

"Quite so, sir," he said, and vanished.

"My father," Lambert said, "is in the library—that first door. Wait. I'll see if he's alone."

Painfully he limped to the door and opened it, while George waited, endeavouring not to pull at his cap.

"Father," Lambert said, smoothly, "Mr. Morton is calling."

A deep voice, muffled by distance, vibrated in the hall.

"What are you talking about?"

Lambert bowed profoundly.

"Mr. Morton from the lodge."

George stepped close to him.

"Want me to thrash you again?"

Lambert faced him without panic.

"I don't admit that you could, but, my dear—George, I'm too fatigued to-night to find out. Some day, if the occasion should arise, I hope I may. I do sincerely."

He drew the door wide open, and stepped aside with a bow that held no mockery. A white-haired, stately woman entered the hall, and, as she passed, cast at George a glance curiously lacking in vitality. In her George saw the spring of Sylvia's delicacy and beauty. Whatever Old Planter might be this woman had something from the past, not to be acquired, with which to endow her children. George resented it. It made the future for him appear more difficult. Her voice was in keeping, cultured and unaffected.

"Mr. Planter is alone, Morton. He would like to see you."

She disappeared in a room opposite. George took a deep breath.

"On that threshold," Lambert said, kindly, "I've often felt the same way, though I've never deserved it as you do."

George plunged through and closed the door.

The room was vaster than the hall, and darker, impressing him confusedly with endless, filled book-

shelves; with sculpture; with a difficult maze of furniture. The only light issued from a lamp on a huge and littered table at the opposite end.

At first George glanced vainly about, seeking the famous man.

"Step over here, Morton."

There was no denying that voice. It came from a deep chair whose back was turned to the light. It sent to George's heart his first touch of fear. He walked carefully across the rugs and around the table until he faced the figure in the chair. He wanted to get rid of his cap. He couldn't resist the temptation to pull at it; and only grooms and stable boys tortured caps.

The portly figure in evening clothes was not calculated to put a culprit at ease. Old Planter sat very straight. The carefully trimmed white side whiskers, the white hair, the bushy brows above inflamed eyes, composed a portrait suggestive of a power relentless and not to be trifled with. George had boasted he was as good as any one. He knew he wasn't as good as Old Planter; their disparity of attainment was too easily palpable. No matter whether Old Planter's success was worthy, he had gone out into the world and done things. He had manipulated railroads. He had piled up millions whose number he couldn't be sure of himself. He had built this house and all it stood for. What one man had done another could. George stopped pulling at his cap. He threw it on the table as into a ring. His momentary fear died.

"You sent for me, sir."

The mark of respect flowed naturally. This old fellow was entitled to it, from him or any one else.

The bass voice had a dynamic quality.

"I did. This afternoon you grossly and inexcusably insulted my daughter. It will be necessary to speak of her to you just once more. That's why I told your father to send you. If I were younger it would give me pleasure to break every bone in your body."

The red lips opened and shut with the precision of a steel trap. They softened now in a species of smile.

"I see, Morton, you had a little argument with a horse this afternoon."

George managed to smile back.

"Nothing to speak of, sir."

"I wish it had been. I take a pleasure in punishing you. It isn't biblical, but it's human. I'm only sorry I can't devise a punishment to fit the crime."

"It was no crime," George said bravely, "no insult."

"Keep your mouth shut. Unfortunately I can't do much more than run you away from here, for I don't care to evict your parents from their home for your folly; and they do not support you. Mr. Evans will pay you off in the morning with a month's extra wages."

"I won't take a cent I haven't earned," George said.

Old Planter studied him with more curiosity.

"You're a queer livery stable boy."

"I'm banking on that," George said, willing the other

should make what he would of it.

"It's there if you wish it," Old Planter went on. "I sent for you so that I could tell you myself that you will be away from Oakmont and from the neighbourhood by noon to-morrow. And remember your home is now a portion of Oakmont. You will never come near us again. You will forget what happened this afternoon."

He stood up, his face reddening. George wanted to tell him that Sylvia herself had said he shouldn't forget.

"If, Morton," the old man went on with a biting earnestness, "once you're away from Oakmont, you ever bother Miss Sylvia again, or make any attempt to see her, I'll dispossess your parents, and I'll drive you out of any job you get. I'll keep after you until you'll understand what you're defying. This isn't an idle threat. I have the power."

The father completely conquered him. He clenched his knotted fists.

"I'd destroy a regiment of creatures like you to spare my little girl one of the tears you caused her this afternoon."

"After all," George said, defensively, "I'm a human being."

Old Planter shook his head.

"If your father hadn't failed you'd have spent your life in a livery stable. It takes education, money, breeding to make a human being."

George nodded. He wouldn't need to plan much for himself, after all. Sylvia's father was doing it for him.

"I've heard some pretty hard words to-day, sir," he said. "It's waked me up. Can't a man get those things for himself?"

He fancied reminiscence in Old Planter's eyes.

"The right kind can. Get out of here now, Morton, and don't let me see you or hear of you again."

George stepped between him and the table to pick up his cap. His nerves tightened. Close to his cap lay an unmounted photograph, not very large, of Sylvia. What a companion piece for the broken crop! What an ornament for an altar dedicated to ambition, to anger, and to love! He would take it under her father's nose, following her father's threats.

He slipped his cap over the photograph, and picked up both, the precious likeness hidden by the cheap cloth.

"Good-night, sir."

He thought Old Planter started at the ring in his voice. He walked swiftly from the room. Let Old Planter look out for himself. What did all those threats amount to? Perhaps he could steal Sylvia as easily from under her terrible parent's nose.

VI

Lambert, hands in pockets, stopped him in the hall.

"Packed off, as you deserve, but you'll need money."

"Thanks," George said. "I don't want any I don't earn."

"If father should kick me out," Lambert drawled, "I'd be inclined to take what I could get."

"I'd rather steal," George said.

Lambert smiled whimsically.

"A word of advice. Stealing's dangerous unless you take enough."

George indicated the library door. He tried to imitate Lambert's manner.

"Then I suppose it's genius."

"What are you getting at?"

"I mean," George said, "you people may drive me to stealing, but it'll be the kind you get patted on the back for."

"Sounds like Wall Street," Lambert smiled.

George wanted to put himself on record in this house.

"I'm going to make money, and don't you forget it."

Lambert's smile widened.

"Then good luck, and a good job—George."

George crushed his helpless irritation, turned, and walked out the front door; more disappointed than he would have thought possible, because he had failed to see Sylvia.

Reluctantly he returned to the nearly silent discomfort of his parents. He tried to satisfy their curiosity.

"Nothing but threats. I'm to be driven to crime if I'm ever heard of after I leave Oakmont in the morning."

"He might have made it worse," his father grunted.

The conversation died for lack of an interpreter.

His father made a pretence of reading a newspaper. His mother examined her swollen hands. Her eyes suggested the nearness of tears. George got up.

"I suppose I'd better be getting ready."

As he stooped to kiss her his mother slipped an arm around his neck.

"Mother's little boy."

George steadied his voice.

"Good-night, Dad."

His father filled his pipe reflectively.

"Good-night, George."

No word of sympathy; no sympathy at all, beyond a fugitive, half-frightened hint from his mother, because he had run boldly against a fashion of thinking; little more, really.

He softly closed the door of his room, the last time he would ever do that! He sat on the edge of the bed. He took Sylvia's photograph from his pocket and studied it with a deliberate lack of sentiment. He fancied her desirable lips framing epithets of angry contempt and those other words to which he had given his own significance.

"You'll not forget."

He looked so long, repeating it in his mind so often, that at last his eyes blurred, and the pictured lips seemed, indeed, to curve and straighten.

"You'll not forget."

He tapped the photograph with his forefinger.

"You're going to help me remember," he muttered. "I'll not forget."

VII

He placed the photograph and the broken crop at the bottom of his oilcloth suitcase. The rest of his packing was simple; he had so little that was actually his own. There were a few books on a shelf, relics of his erratic attendance at the neighbouring high school—he regretted now that his ambition there had been physical rather that mental. Even in the development of his muscles, however, his brain had grown a good deal, for he was bright enough. If he made himself work, drawing on what money he had, he might get ready for college by fall. He had always envied the boys, who had drifted annually from the high school to the remote and exhilarating grandeur of a university.

What had Old Planter's sequence been? Education, money, breeding. Of course. And he guessed that the three necessities might, to an extent, walk hand in hand. The acquisition of an education would mean personal contacts, helpful financially, projecting, perhaps, that culture that he felt was as essential as the rest. Certainly the starting place for him was a big university where a man, once in, could work his way through. Lambert went to Yale. Harvard sprang into his mind, but there was the question of railroad fare and lost time. He'd better try his luck at Princeton which wasn't far and which had, he'd heard, a welcome for boys working their way through college.

He examined his bank book. Fortunately, since he had lived with his parents, he had had little opportunity or need for spending. The balance showed nearly five hundred dollars, and he would receive fifty more in the morning. If he could find someone to bolster up his insufficient schooling for a part of that amount he'd make a go of it; he'd be fairly on his course.

He went to bed, but he slept restlessly. He wanted to be away from Oakmont and at work. Through his clouded mind persisted his desire for a parting glimpse of Sylvia. If he slept at all it was to the discordant memory of her anger.

The sun smiled into his room, summoning him to get up and go forth.

His father was not there. As if to emphasize the occasion, his mother deserted her washtub, served his breakfast herself, stood about in helpless attitudes.

"George," she whispered, toward the close of the desolate meal, "try to get a job near here. Of course you could never come home, but we could go to see you."

"Father," he said, "is kicking me out as much as Old Planter is, and you back him up."

She clasped her hands.

"I've got to. And you can't blame your father. He has to look after himself and me."

"It makes no difference. I'm not going to take a job near by," he said.

"Where are you going?" she asked, sharply.

He stared at her for a moment, profoundly sorry for her and for himself.

"I'm going to get away from everything that would remind me I've ever been treated like something less than human."

She gave a little cry.

"Then say good-bye, my son, before your father comes back."

VIII

His father returned and stood impatiently waiting. There was nothing to hold George except that unlikely chance of a glimpse of Sylvia. He would say good-bye here, go up to the offices for his money, and then walk straight out of Oakmont. He stepped from the house, swinging his suitcase, his overcoat across his arm.

"I'm off," he said, trying to make his voice cheery.

His father considered his cold pipe. He held out his hand.

"It's a bad start, but maybe you'll turn out all right after all."

George smiled his confidence.

"Well, let us hear from you," his father went on, "although as things are I don't see how I could help you much."

"Don't worry," George said.

He walked to his mother, who had returned to her work. He kissed her quickly, saying nothing, for he

saw the tears falling from her cheeks to the dirty water out of which linen emerged soft and immaculate. He strode toward the main driveway.

"Good-bye," he called quickly.

The renewed racket at the tub pursued him until he had placed a screen of foliage between himself and the little house. His last recollection of home, indeed, was of swollen hands and swollen eyes, and of clean, white tears dropping into offensive water.

He got his money and walked past the great house and down the driveway. He would not see home again. At a turn near the gate he caught his breath, his eyes widening. The vague chance had after all materialized. Sylvia walked briskly along, accompanied by a vicious-looking bulldog on a leash. Her head was high and her shoulders square, as she always carried them. Her eyes sparkled. Then she saw George, and she paused, her expression altering into an active distaste, her cheeks flushing with tempestuous colour.

"I can't go back now," George thought.

She seemed to visualize all that protected her from him. He put his cheap suitcase down.

"I'm glad I saw you," he said, deliberately. "I wanted to thank you for having me fired, for waking me up."

She didn't answer. She stood quite motionless. The dog growled, straining at his leash toward the man in the road.

"I've been told to get out and stay out," he went on, his temper lashed by her immobility. "You know I meant what I said yesterday when I thought you

couldn't hear. I did. Every last word. And you might as well understand now I'll make every word good."

He pointed to the gate.

"I'm going out there just so I can come back and prove to you that I don't forget."

Her colour fled. She stooped swiftly, gracefully, and unleashed the anxious bulldog.

"Get him!" she whispered, tensely.

Like a shot the dog sprang for George. He caught the animal in his arms and submitted to its moist and eager caresses.

"It's a mistake," he pointed out, "to send a dog that loves the stables after a stable boy."

He dropped the dog, picked up his suitcase, and started down the drive. The dog followed him. He turned.

"Go back, Roland!"

Sylvia remained crouched. She cried out, her contralto voice crowded with surprise and repulsion:

"Take him with you. I never want to see him again."

So, followed by the dog, George walked bravely out into the world through the narrow gateway of her home.

PART II

PRINCETON

I

"Young man, you've two years' work to enter."

"Just when," George asked, "does college open?"

"If the world continues undisturbed, in about two months."

"Very well. Then I'll do two years' work in two months."

"You've only one pair of eyes, my boy; only one brain."

George couldn't afford to surrender. He had arrived in Princeton the evening before, a few hours after leaving Oakmont. It had been like a crossing between two planets. Breathlessly he had sought and found a cheap room in a students' lodging house, and afterward, guided by the moonlight, he had wandered, spellbound, about the campus.

Certainly this could not be George Morton, yesterday definitely divided from what Old Planter had described as human beings. His exaltation grew. For a long time he walked in an amicable companionship of broader spaces and more arresting architecture than even Oakmont could boast; and it occurred to him, if he should enter college, he would have as much share in all this as the richest student; at Princeton he would live in the Great House.

His mood altered as he returned to his small, scantily

furnished room whose very unloveliness outlined the difficulties that lay ahead.

He unpacked his suitcase and came upon Sylvia's photograph and her broken riding crop. In the centre of the table, where he would work, he placed the photograph with a piece of the crop on either side. Whenever he was alone in the room those objects would be there, perpetual lashes to ambition; whenever he went out he would lock them away.

How lovely and desirable she was! How hateful! How remote! Had ever a man such a goal to strain for? He wanted only to start.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning he set forth. He had never seen a town so curiously empty. There were no students, since it was the long vacation, except a few backward men and doubtful candidates for admission. He stared by daylight at the numerous buildings which were more imposing now, more suggestive of learning, wealth, and breeding. They seemed to say they had something for him if only he would fight hard enough to receive it.

First of all, he had to find someone who knew the ropes. There must be professors here, many men connected with this gigantic plant. On Nassau Street he encountered a youth, a little younger than himself, who, with a bored air, carried three books under his arm. George stopped him.

"I beg your pardon. Are you going here?"

The other looked him over as if suspecting a joke.

"Going where?" he asked, faintly.

George appraised the fine quality of the young man's

clothing. He was almost sorry he had spoken. The first thing he had to do was to overcome a reluctance to speak to people who obviously already had much that he was after.

"I mean," he explained, "are you going to this college?"

"The Lord," the young man answered, "and Squibs Bailly alone know. I'm told I'm not very bright in the head."

George smiled.

"Then I guess you can help me out. I'm not either. I want to enter in the fall, and I need a professor or something like that to teach me. I'll pay."

The other nodded.

"You need a coach. Bailly's a good one. I'm going there now to be told for two hours I'm an utter ass. Maybe I am, but what's the use rubbing it in? I don't know that he's got any open time, but you might come along and see."

George, his excitement increasing, walked beside his new acquaintance.

"What's your name?" the bored youth asked all at once.

"Morton. George Morton."

"I'm Godfrey Rogers. Lawrenceville. What prep are you?"

"What what?"

"I mean, what school you come from?"

George experienced a sharp discomfort, facing the first of his unforeseen embarrassments. Evidently his simple will to crush the past wouldn't be sufficient.

"I went to a public school off and on," he muttered.

Rogers' eyes widened. George had a feeling that the boy had receded. It wasn't until later, when he had learned the customs of the place, that he could give that alteration its logical value. It made no difference. He had a guide. Straightway he would find a man who could help him get in; but he noticed that Rogers abandoned personalities, chatting only of the difficulties of entrance papers, and the apparent mad desire of certain professors to keep good men from matriculating.

They came to a small frame house on Dickinson Street. Rogers left George in the hall while he entered the study. The door did not quite close, and phrases slipped out in Rogers' glib voice, and, more frequently, in a shrill, querulous one.

"Don't know a thing about him. Just met him on the street looking for a coach. No prep."

"Haven't the time. I've enough blockheads as it is. He'd better go to Corse's school."

"You won't see him?"

"Oh, send him in," George heard Bailly say irritably. "You, Rogers, would sacrifice me or the entire universe to spare your brain five minutes' useful work. I'll find out what he knows, and pack him off to Corse. Wait in the hall."

Rogers came out, shaking his head.

"Guess there's nothing doing, but he'll pump you."

George entered and closed the door. Behind a table desk lounged a long, painfully thin figure. The head was nearly bald, but the face carried a luxuriant, carelessly trimmed Van Dyke beard. Above it cheeks and forehead were intricately wrinkled, and the tweed suit, apparently, strove to put itself in harmony. It was difficult to guess how old Squibs Bailly was; probably very ancient, yet in his eyes George caught a flashing spirit of youth.

The room was forcefully out of key with its occupant. The desk, extremely neat with papers, blotters, and pens, was arranged according to a careful pattern. On books and shelves no speck of dust showed, and so far the place was scholarly. Then George was a trifle surprised to notice, next to a sepia print of the Parthenon, a photograph of a football team. That, moreover, was the arrangement around the four walls—classic ruins flanked by modern athletes. On a table in the window, occupying what one might call the position of honour, stood a large framed likeness of a young man in football togs.

Before George had really closed the door the high voice had opened its attack.

"I haven't any more time for dunces."

"I'm not a dunce," George said, trying to hold his temper.

Bailly didn't go on right away. The youthful glance absorbed each detail of George's face and build.

"Anyhow," he said after a moment, less querulously, "let's see what you lack of the infantile requirements needful for entrance in an American university."

He probed George's rapid acquaintance with

mathematics, history, English, and the classics. With modern languages there was none. Then the verdict came. Two years' work.

"I've got to make my eyes and brain do," George said. "I've got to enter college this fall or never. I tell you, Mr. Bailly, I am going to do it. I know you can help me, if you will. I'll pay."

Bailly shook his head.

"Even if I had the time my charges are high."

George showed his whole hand.

"I have about five hundred dollars."

"For this condensed acquisition of a kindergarten knowledge, or—or——"

"For everything. But only let me get in and I'll work my way through."

Again Bailly shook his head.

"You can't get in this fall, and it's not so simple to work your way through."

"Then," George said, "you refuse to do anything for me?"

The youthful eyes squinted. George had an odd impression that they sought beyond his body to learn just what manner of man he was. The querulous voice possessed more life.

"How tall are you?"

"A little over six feet."

"What's your weight?"

George hesitated, unable to see how such questions could affect his entering college. He decided it was better to answer.

"A hundred and eighty-five."

"Good build!" Bailly mused. "Wish I'd had a build like that. If your mind is as well proportioned——Take your coat off. Roll up your sleeves."

"What for?" George asked.

Bailly arose and circled the desk. George saw that the skeleton man limped.

"Because I'd like to see if the atrophying of your brain has furnished any compensations."

George grinned. The portrait in the window seemed friendly. He obeyed.

Bailly ran his hand over George's muscles. His young eyes widened.

"Ever play football?"

George shook his head doubtfully.

"Not what you would call really playing. Why? Would football help?"

"Provided one's the right stuff otherwise, would being a god help one climb Olympus?" Bailly wanted to know.

He indicated the framed likeness in the window.

"That's Bill Gregory."

"Seems to me I've seen his name in the papers," George said.

Bailly stared.

"Without doubt, if you read the public prints at all. He exerted much useful cunning and strength in the Harvard and Yale games last fall. He was on everybody's All-American eleven. I got him into college and man-handled him through. Hence this scanty hair, these premature furrows; for although he had plenty of good common-sense, and was one of the finest boys I've ever known, he didn't possess, speaking relatively, when it came to iron-bound text-books, the brains of a dinosaur; but he had the brute force of one."

"Why did you do it?" George asked. "Because he was rich?"

"Young man," Bailly answered, "I am a product of this seat of learning. With all its faults—and you may learn their number for yourself some day—its success is pleasing to me, particularly at football. I am very fond of football, perhaps because it approximates in our puling, modern fashion, the classic public games of ruddier days. In other words, I was actuated by a formless emotion called Princeton spirit. Don't ask me what that is. I don't know. One receives it according to one's concept. But when I saw in Bill something finer and more determined than most men possess, I made up my mind Princeton was going to be proud of him, on the campus, on the football field, and afterward out in the world."

The hollow, wrinkled face flushed.

"When Bill made a run I could think of it as my run. When he made a touchdown I could say, 'there's one score that wouldn't have been made if I hadn't booted Bill into college, and kept him from flunking

out by sheer brute mentality!' Pardon me, Mr. Morton. I love the silly game."

George smiled, sensing his way, if only he could make this fellow feel he would be the right kind of Princeton man!

"I was going to say," he offered, "that while I had never had a chance to play on a regular team I used to mix it up at school, but I was stronger than most of the boys. There were one or two accidents. They thought I'd better quit."

Bailly laughed.

"That's the kind of material we want. You do look as if you could bruise a blue or a crimson jersey. Know where the field house is? Ask anybody. Do no harm for the trainer to look you over. Be there at three o'clock."

"But my work? Will you help me?"

"Give me," Bailly pled, "until afternoon to decide if I'll take another ten years from my life. That's all. Send that fellow Rogers in. Be at the field house at three o'clock."

And as George passed out he heard him reviling the candidate.

"Don't see why you come to college. No chance to make the team or a Phi Beta Kappa. One ought to be a requisite."

The shrill voice went lower. George barely caught the words certainly not intended for him.

"You know I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that fellow you brought me, if he had a chance, might do both."

II

George, since he had nothing else to do, walked home. Bailly could get him in if he would. Did it really depend in part on the inspection he would have to undergo that afternoon? It was hard there was nothing he could do to prepare himself. He went to the yard, to which the landlady had condemned Sylvia's bulldog, and, to kill time, played with the friendly animal until luncheon. Afterward he sat in his room before Sylvia's portrait impressing on himself the necessity of strength for the coming ordeal.

His landlady directed him glibly enough to the field house. As he crossed the practice gridiron, not yet chalked out, he saw Bailly on the verandah; and, appearing very small and sturdy beside him, a gray-haired, pleasant-faced man whose small eyes were relentless.

"This is the prospect, Green," George heard Bailly say.

The trainer studied George for some time before he nodded his head.

"A build to hurt and not get hurt," he said at last; "but, Mr. Bailly, it's hard to supply experience. Boys come here who have played all their lives, and they know less than nothing. Bone seems to grow naturally in the football cranium."

He shifted back to George.

"How fast are you?"

"I've never timed myself, but I'm hard to catch."

"Get out there," the trainer directed.

"In those clothes?" Bailly asked.

"Why not? The ground's dry. A man wouldn't run any faster with moleskins and cleats. Now you run as far as the end of that stand. Halt there for a minute, then turn and come back."

He drew out a stop watch.

"All set? Then—git!"

George streaked down the field.

"It's an even hundred yards," the trainer explained to Bailly.

As George paused at the end of the stand the trainer snapped his watch, whistling.

"There are lots with running shoes and drawers wouldn't do any better. Let's have him back."

He waved his arm. George tore up and leant against the railing, breathing hard, but not uncomfortably.

"You were a full second slower coming back," the trainer said with a twinkle.

"I'm sorry," George cried. "Let me try it again."

Green shook his head.

"I'd rather see you make a tackle, but I've no one to spare."

He grinned invitation at Bailly.

"My spirit, Green," the tutor said, "is less fragile than my corpus, but it has some common-sense. I prefer others should perish at the hands of my discoveries."

"You've scrubbed around," the trainer said, appraising George's long, muscular legs. "Ever kick a football?"

"A little."

Green entered the field house, reappearing after a moment with a football tucked under his arm.

"Do you mind stepping down the field, Mr. Bailly, to catch what he punts? I wouldn't go too far."

Bailly nodded and walked a short distance away. The trainer gave George the football and told him to kick it to Bailly. George stepped on the grass and swung his leg. If the ball had travelled horizontally as far as it did toward heaven it would have been a good kick. For half an hour the trainer coached interestedly, teaching George the fundamentals of kicking form. Some of the later punts, indeed, boomed down the field for considerable distances, but in George's mind the high light of that unexpected experience remained the lanky, awkward figure in wrinkled tweeds, limping about the field, sometimes catching the ball, sometimes looking hurt when it bounded from his grasp, sometimes missing it altogether, and never once losing the flashing pleasure from his eyes or the excitement out of his furrowed face.

"Enough," the trainer said at last.

George heard him confide to the puffing tutor:

"Possibilities. Heaven knows we'll need them a year from this fall, especially in the kicking line. I believe this fellow can be taught."

Bailly, his hands shaking from his recent exercise, lighted a pipe. He assumed a martyr's air. His voice

sounded as though someone had done him an irreparable wrong.

"Then I'll have to try, but it's hard on me, Green, you'll admit."

George hid his excitement. He knew he had passed his first examination. He was sure he would enter college. Already he felt the confidence most men placed in Squibs Bailly.

"Wouldn't you have taken him on anyway, Mr. Bailly?" the trainer laughed. "Anyway, a lot of my players are first-group men. I depend on you to turn him over in the fall for the Freshman eleven. Going to town?"

"Come on, Morton," Bailly said, remorsefully.

Side by side the three walked through to Nassau Street and past the campus. George said nothing, drinking in the scarcely comprehensible talk of the others about team prospects and the appalling number of powerful and nimble young men who would graduate the following June.

Near University Place he noticed Rogers loafing in front of a restaurant with several other youths who wore black caps. He wondered why Rogers started and stared at him, then turned, speaking quickly to the others.

Green went down University Place. George paced on with Bailly. In front of the Nassau Club the tutor paused.

"I'm going in here," he said, "but you can come to my house at eight-thirty. We'll work until ten-thirty. We'll do that every night until your brain wrinkles a

trifle. You may not have been taught that twenty-four hours are allotted to each day. Eight for sleep. Two with me. Two for meals. Two at the field. Two for a run in the country. That leaves eight for study, and you'll need every minute of them. I'll give you your schedule to-night. If you break it once I'll drop you, for you've got to have a brain beyond the ordinary to make it wrinkle enough."

"Thanks, Mr. Bailly. If you don't mind, what will it cost?"

Bailly considered.

"I'll have to charge you," he said at last, "twenty-five dollars, but I can lend you most of the books."

George understood, but his pride was not hurt.

"I'll pay you in other ways."

Bailly looked at him, his emaciated face smiling all over.

"I think you will," he said with a little nod. "All right. At eight-thirty."

He limped along the narrow cement walk and entered the club. George started back. The group, he noticed, still loitered in front of the restaurant. Rogers detached himself and strolled across. He was no longer suspicious.

"You been down at the field with Mr. Green?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Running a little, kicking a football around."

"Trust Bailly to guess you played. What did Green say?"

"If I get in," George, answered simply, "I think he'll give me a show."

"I guess so," Rogers said, thoughtfully, "or he wouldn't be wasting his time on you now. Come on over and meet these would-be Freshmen. We'll all be in the same class unless we get brain-fever. Mostly Lawrenceville."

George crossed and submitted to elaborate introductions and warm greetings.

"Green's grooming him already for the Freshman eleven," Rogers explained.

George accepted the open admiration cautiously, not forgetting what he had been yesterday, what Sylvia had said. Why was Rogers so friendly all at once?

"What prep?" "Where'd you play?" "Line or backfield?"

The rapidity of the questions lessened his discomfort. How was he to avoid such moments? He must make his future exceptionally full so that it might submerge the past of which he couldn't speak without embarrassment. In this instance Rogers helped him out.

"Morton's bummed around. Never went to any school for long."

George pondered this kind act and its fashion as he excused himself and walked on to his lodging. There was actually something to hide, and Rogers admitted it, and was willing to lend a cloak. He could guess why. Because Green was bothering with him, had

condescended to be seen on the street with him. George's vision broadened.

He locked himself in his room and sat before his souvenirs. Sylvia's provocative features seemed clearer. For a long time he stared hungrily. He had an absurd impression that he had already advanced toward her. Perhaps he had in view of what had happened that afternoon.

His determination as well as his strength had clearly attracted Bailly; yet that strength, its possible application to football, had practically assured him he would enter college, had made an ally of the careful Rogers, had aroused the admiration of such sub-Freshmen as were in town. It became clear that if he should be successful at football he would achieve a position of prominence from which he could choose friends useful here and even in the vital future after college.

His planning grew more practical. If football, a game of which he knew almost nothing, could do that, what might he not draw from one he thoroughly knew—anything concerning horses, for instance, hunting, polo? The men interested in horses would be the rich, the best—he choked a trifle over the qualification—the financial and social leaders of the class. He would have that card up his sleeve. He would play it when it would impress most. Skill at games, he hazarded, would make it easier than he had thought to work his way through.

Whatever distaste such cold calculation brought he destroyed by staring at Sylvia's remote beauty. If he was to reach such a goal he would have to use every possible short cut, no matter how unlovely.

He found that evening a radical alteration in Squibs Bailly's study. The blotter was spattered with ink. Papers littered the desk and drifted about the floor. Everything within reach of the tutor's hands was disarranged and disreputably untidy. Bailly appeared incomparably more comfortable.

The course opened with a small lecture, delivered while the attenuated man limped up and down the cluttered room.

"Don't fancy," he began, "that you have found in football a key to the scholastic labyrinth."

His wrinkled face assumed a violent disapproval. His youthful eyes flashed resentfully.

"Mr. Morton, if I suffered the divine Delphic frenzy and went to the Dean and assured him you were destined to be one of our very best undergraduates and at the same time would make fifteen touchdowns against Yale, and roughly an equal number against Harvard, do you know what he would reply?"

George gathered that an answer wasn't necessary.

"You might think," the tutor resumed, limping faster than ever, "that he would run his fingers through his hair, if he had sufficient; would figuratively flame with pleasure; would say: 'Miraculous, Mr. Bailly. You are a great benefactor. We must get this extraordinary youth in the university even if he can't parse "the cat caught the rat."'"

Bailly paused. He clashed his hands together.

"Now I'll tell you what he'd actually reply. 'Interesting if true, Mr. Bailly. But what are his

scholastic attainments? Can he solve a quadratic equation in his head? Has he committed to memory my favourite passages of the "Iliad" of Homer and the "Aeneid" of Virgil? Can he name the architect of the Parthenon or the sculptor of the Aegean pediments? No? Horrible! Then off with his head!'"

Bailly draped himself across his chair.

"Therefore it behooves us to get to work."

III

That was the first of sixty-odd toilsome, torturing evenings, for Bailly failed to honour the Sabbath; and, after that first lecture, drab business alone coloured those hours. The multiplicity of subjects was confusing; but, although Bailly seldom told him so, George progressed rapidly, and Bailly knew just where to stress for the examinations.

If it had ended there it would have been bad enough. When he studied the schedule Bailly gave him that first night he had a despairing feeling that either he or it must break down. Everything was accounted for even to the food he was to eat. That last, in fact, created a little difficulty with the landlady, who seemed to have no manner of appreciation of the world-moving importance of football. Rogers wanted to help out there, too. He had found George's lodging. It was when Green's interest was popular knowledge, when from the Nassau Club had slipped the belief that Squibs Bailly had turned his eyes on another star. George made it dispassionately clear to Rogers that Bailly had not allowed in his schedule for calls. Rogers was visibly disappointed.

"Where do you eat, then?"

"Here—with Mrs. Michin."

"Now look, Morton. That's no way. Half a dozen of us are eating at Joe's restaurant. They're the best of the sub-Freshmen that are here. Come along with us."

The manner of the invitation didn't make George at all reluctant to tell the truth.

"I can't afford to be eating around in restaurants."

"That needn't figure," Rogers said, quickly. "Green's probably only letting you eat certain things. I'll guarantee Joe'll take you on for just what you're paying Mrs. Michin."

George thought rapidly. He could see through Rogers now. The boy wanted, even as he did, to run with the best, but for a vastly different cause. That was why his manner had altered that first morning when he had sized George up as the unfinished product of a public school, why it had altered again when he had sensed in him a football star. George's heart warmed, but not to Rogers. Because he rioted around for a period each afternoon in an odorous football suit he was already, in the careful Rogers' eyes, one of the most prominent of the students in town. For the same reason he was in a position to wait and make sure that Rogers himself was the useful sort. George possessed no standard by which to judge, and it would be a mistake to knot ropes that he might want to break later; nor did he care for that sort of charity, no matter how well disguised, so he shook his head.

"Green and Squibs wouldn't put up with it."

He wheedled his landlady, instead, into a better humour, paying her reluctantly a little more.

The problem of expenses was still troublesome, but it became evident that there, too, Bailly would be a useful guide.

"I have actually bearded the dean about you," he said one evening. "There are a few scholarships not yet disposed of. If I can prove to him that you live by syntax alone you may get one. As for the rest, there's the commons. Impecunious students profitably wait on table there."

George's flush was not pretty.

"I'll not be a servant," he snapped.

"It's no disgrace," Bailly said, mildly.

"It is—for me."

He didn't like Bailly's long, slightly pained scrutiny. There was no use keeping things from him anyway.

"I can trust you, Mr. Bailly," he said, quickly, and in a very low voice, as if the walls might hear: "I know you won't give me away. I—I was too much like a servant until the day I came to Princeton. I've sworn I'd never be again. I can't touch that job. I tell you I'd rather starve."

"To do so," Bailly remarked, drily, "would be a senseless suicide. You'll appreciate some day, young man, that the world lives by service."

George wondered why he glanced at the untidy table with a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"I'm also sorry to learn your ambition is not altogether unselfish, or altogether worthy."

George longed to make Bailly understand.

"It was forced on me," he said. "I worked in my father's livery business until he failed. Then I had to go to a rich man's stable. I was treated like dirt. Nobody would have anything to do with me. They won't here, probably, if they find out."

"Never mind," Bailly sighed. "We will seek other means. Let us get on with our primers."

Once or twice, when some knotty problem took George to the house during the early morning, he found the spic-and-span neatness he had observed at his first visit. In Bailly's service clearly someone laboured with a love of labour, without shame or discouragement.

One evening in August the maid who customarily opened the door was replaced by a short, plump-looking woman well over thirty. She greeted George with kindly eyes.

"I daresay you're Mr. Morton. I've heard a great deal about you."

George had never seen a face more unaffected, more friendly, more competent. His voice was respectful.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And I am Mrs. Bailly. We expect much of you."

There rushed over George a feeling that, his own ambition aside, he had to give them a great deal. No wonder Squibs felt as he did if his ideas of service had emerged from such a source.

That portion of his crowded schedule George grew eventually to like. It brought him either unrestrained scolding or else a tempered praise; and he enjoyed his cross-country runs. Sylvia's bulldog usually

accompanied him, unleashed, for he could control the animal. With surprised eyes he saw estates as extravagant as Oakmont, and frequently in better taste. Little by little he picked up the names of the families that owned them. He told himself that some day he would enter those places as a guest, bowed to by such servants as he had been. It was possible, he promised himself bravely, if only he could win a Yale or a Harvard game.

He enjoyed, too, the hours he spent at the field. He could measure his progress there as well as in Bailly's study. Green was slow with either praise or blame, but sometimes Rogers and his clan would come down, and, sitting in the otherwise empty stands, would audibly marvel at the graceful trajectory of his punts. He soiled himself daily at the tackling dummy. He sprawled after an elusive ball, falling on it or picking it up on the run. Meantime, he had absorbed the elements of the rules. He found them rather more complicated than the classics.

The head coach came from the city one day. Like Green, he said nothing in praise or blame, merely criticising pleasantly; but George felt that he was impressed. The great man even tossed the ball about with him for a while, teaching him to throw at a definite mark. After that Rogers and his cronies wanted to be more in evidence than ever, but George had no time for them, or for anything outside his work.

His will to survive the crushing grind never really faltered, but he resented its necessity, sometimes wistfully, sometimes with turbulence. He despised himself for regretting certain pleasanter phases of his serfdom at Oakmont. The hot, stuffy room on the top

floor of the frame house; the difficult books; the papers streaked with intricate and reluctant figures, contrived frequently to swing his mind to pastoral corners of the Planter estate. He might have held title to them, they had been so much his own. He had used them during his free time for the reading of novels, and latterly, he remembered, for formless dreams of Sylvia's beauty. At least his mind had not been put to the torture there. He had had time to listen to a bird's song, to ingratiate himself with a venturesome squirrel, to run his hands through the long grass, to lie half asleep, brain quite empty save for a temporal content.

Now, running or walking in the country, he found no time for the happier aspects of woods or fields. He had to drive himself physically in order that his mind could respond to Bailly's urgencies. And sometimes, as has been suggested, his revolt was more violent. He paced his room angrily. Why did he do it? Why did he submit? Eventually his eyes would turn to her photograph, and he would go back to his table.

He was grateful for the chance that had let him pick up that picture. Without its constant supervision he might not have been able to keep up the struggle. During the worst moments, when some solution mocked him, he would stare at the likeness while his brain fought, while, with a sort of self-hypnosis induced by that pictured face, he willed himself to keep on.

One night, when he had suffered over an elusive equation beyond his scheduled bedtime, he found his eyes, as he stared at the picture, blurring strangely; then the thing was done, the answer proved; but after what an effort! Why did his eyes blur? Because

of the intensity of some emotion whose significance he failed all at once to grasp. He continued to stare at Sylvia's beauty, informed even here with a sincere intolerance; at those lips which had released the contempt that had delivered him to this other slavery. Abruptly the emotion, that had seemed to leap upon him from the books and the complicated figures, defined itself with stark, unavoidable brutality. He reached out and with both hands grasped the photograph. He wanted to snatch his hands apart, ripping the paper, destroying the tranquil, arrogant features. He replaced the picture, leant back, and continued hypnotically to study it. His hands grasped the table's edge while the blurring of his eyes increased. He spoke aloud in a clear and sullen voice:

"I hate you," he said. "With all my heart and soul and body I hate you."

IV

About this time one partial break in the schedule came like a strong tonic. Bailly at the close of an evening's session spoke, George fancied, with a little embarrassment.

"My wife wants to speak to you before you go."

He raised his voice.

"Martha! The battle's over for to-night."

She came quietly in and perched herself on the arm of a chair.

"I'm having a few people for dinner to-morrow," she explained. "There's one young girl, so I want a young

man. Won't you help me out?"

George's elation was shot with doubt of an unexplored territory. This promised an advance if he could find the way. He glanced inquiringly at Bailly.

"Women," the tutor said, "lack a sense of values. I shall be chained anyway to my wife's ill-conceived hospitality, so you might as well come. But we'll dine early so we won't destroy an entire evening."

"Then at seven-thirty, Mr. Morton," Mrs. Bailly said.

"Thank you," George answered. "I shall be very happy to come."

As a matter of fact, he was there before seven-thirty, over-anxious to be socially adequate. He had worried a good deal about the invitation. Could it be traced to his confession to Bailly? Was it, in any sense, a test? At least it bristled with perplexities. His ordinary suit of clothing, even after an extended pressing and brushing, was, he felt, out of place. It warned him that of the ritual of a mixed dinner he was blankly ignorant. He established two cardinal principles. He would watch and imitate the others. He wouldn't open his mouth unless he had to.

Bailly, with tact, wore the disgraceful tweeds, but there were two other men, a professor and a resident, George gathered in the rapidity of the introduction which slurred names. These wore evening clothes. Of the two elderly women who accompanied them one was quite dazzling, displaying much jewellery, and projecting an air truly imperial. Side by side with her Mrs. Bailly appeared more than ever a priestess of service; yet to George her serene self-satisfaction seemed ornament

enough.

Where, George wondered, was the girl for whom he had been asked?

Mrs. Bailly drew him from these multiple introductions. He turned and saw the girl standing in the doorway, a dazzling portrait in a dingy frame. As he faced her George was aware of a tightening of all his defences. Her clothing, her attitude, proclaimed her as of Sylvia's sort. He ventured to raise his eyes to her face. It was there, too, the habit of the beautiful, the obvious unfamiliarity with life's grayer tones. Yet she did not resemble Sylvia. Her skin was nearly white. Her hair glinted with gold; but she, too, was lovely. George asked himself if she would have lifted the crop, if all these fortunates reacted to a precise and depressing formula. Somehow he couldn't imagine this girl striking to hurt.

Mrs. Bailly presented him. Her name was Alston, Betty

Alston, it developed during the succeeding general conversation. He fixed the stouter of the men in evening clothes as her father and the imperial woman as her mother. He understood then that they were, indeed, of Sylvia's sort, for during his cross-country work he had frequently passed their home, an immense Tudor house in the midst of pleasant acres.

It was because of the girl that the pitfalls of dinner were bridged. In the technique of accepting Mrs. Bailly's excellent courses he was always a trifle behind her. She made conversation, moreover, surprisingly easy. After the first few moments, during which no one troubled to probe his past, the older

people left them to themselves. She didn't ask what his prep was, or where he lived, or any other thing to make him stammer.

"You look like a football player," she said, frankly.

They talked of his work. He said he had admired her home during his runs. She responded naturally:

"When we are really back you must come and see it more intimately."

The invitation to enter the gates!

He fell silent. Would it be fair to go without giving her an opportunity to treat him as Sylvia had done? Why should she inspire such a question? Hadn't he willed his past to oblivion? Hadn't he determined to take every short cut? Of course he would go, as George Morton, undergraduate, football player, magician with horses. The rest was none of her business.

They were in Princeton, she explained, only for a few days from time to time, but would be definitely back when college opened. She, too, was going to be introduced to society that winter. He wanted to ask her how it was done. He pictured a vast apartment, dense with unpleasant people, and a man who cried out with a brazen voice: "Ladies and gentlemen! This is Miss Sylvia Planter. This is Miss Betty Alston." Quite like an auction.

"It must be wonderful to play football," she was saying. "I should have preferred to be a man. What can a girl do? Bad tennis, rotten golf, something with horses."

He smiled. He could impress Betty Alston, but there

was no point in that, because she was a girl, and he could think of only one girl.

Yet he carried home an impression of unexpected interest and kindness. Her proximity, the rustling of her gown, the barely detectable perfume from her tawny hair, furnished souvenirs intangible but very warm in his memory. They made the portrait and the broken crop seem lifeless and unimpressive.

He forced himself to stare at Sylvia's likeness until the old hypnotic sense returned.

V

He saw Betty Alston once more before college opened, unexpectedly, briefly, and disturbingly; but with all that he carried again to his lodging an impression of a distracting contact.

He was out for a morning run, wearing some ancient flannels Bailly had loaned him, and a sweater, for autumn's first exhilaration sharpened the air. Sylvia's bulldog barked joyously about him as he trotted through a lane not far from the Alston place. He often went that way, perhaps because its gates were already half open. As he turned the corner of a hedge he came face to face with Betty. In a short skirt and knitted jacket she was even more striking than she had been at the Bailly's. The unexpected encounter had brought colour to her rather pale face. The bulldog sprang for her. George halted him with a sharp command.

"I am not afraid of him," she laughed. "Come here, savage beast."

The dog crawled to her and licked her fingers.

George saw her examining the animal curiously.

"I hope he didn't frighten you," he said, his cap in his hand.

She glanced up, and at her voice George straightened, and turned quickly away so that she couldn't see the response to her amazing question. Was it, he asked himself, traceable to Old Planter's threats. Were they going to try to smash him at the start and keep him out of Princeton?

"Do you happen," Betty had said, frowning, "to know Sylvia Planter, or, perhaps, her brother, Lambert?"

George didn't care to lie; nor was it, his instinct told him, safe to lie to Betty. She knew the Planters, then. But how could Old Planter drive him out except through his parents? He wasn't going to be driven out. He turned back slowly. In Betty's face he read only a slight bewilderment.

"That's a queer thing to ask," he managed.

"The dog," she said, caressing the ugly snout, "is the image of one Sylvia Planter was very fond of. Sylvia and I were at school together last year. I've just been visiting her the last few days. She said she had given her dog away."

She drew the dog closer and read the name on the collar.

"Roland! What was the name of her dog?"

George relaxed.

"That dog," he said, harshly, "belongs to me."

She glanced at him, surprised, releasing the dog and

standing up. It wasn't Old Planter then, and his parents were probably safe enough; but had Sylvia, he asked himself angrily, made a story for her guest out of his unwary declaration and his abrupt vanishing from Oakmont? Did this friendly creature know anything? If she did she would cease to be amiable. His anger diminished as he saw the curiosity leave her face.

"An odd resemblance! Do you know, Mr. Morton, I rather think you're bound to meet Lambert Planter anyway. I believe he's a very important young man at Yale. You'll have to play football a little better than he does. His sister and he are going to visit me for a few days before he goes back to New Haven. Perhaps you'll see him then."

George resented the prospect. He got himself away.

"Squibs," he told her, "sees everything. If I loiter he finds out and scolds."

He had an impression that she looked after him until he was out of sight. Or was it the dog that still puzzled her? Something of her, at least, accompanied him longer than that—her kindness, her tact in the matter of the Planters. He would take very good care that he didn't meet Lambert; the prospect of Sylvia's adjacence, however, filled him with a disturbing excitement. He wanted to see her, but he felt it wouldn't be safe to have her see him yet.

Her picture increased his excitement, filled him with a craving for her physical presence. He desired to look at her, as he had looked at the photograph, to see if he could tell himself under those conditions that he hated her. Whether that was true or not, he was more determined than ever to make his boasts

good.

VI

The day of the immediate test approached and he found himself no longer afraid of it. Even Bailly one early September evening abandoned cynicism.

"You've every chance, Morton," he said, puffing at his pipe, "to enter creditably. You may have a condition in French, but what of that? We'll have it off by the divisionals. I'll admit you're far from a dunce. During the next ten days we'll concentrate on the examination idiosyncrasies of my revered colleagues."

The scholarship had, in fact, been won for George, but the necessary work, removed from any suspicion of the servatorial, had not yet been found. Bailly, although he plainly worried himself, told George not to be impatient; then, just before the entrance examinations, the head coach arrived and settled himself in Princeton. Self-assured young men drifted to the field now every afternoon—"varsity men," the Rogers clan whispered with awe. And there were last year's substitutes, and faithful slaves of the scrub, over-anxious, pouring out to early practice, grasping at one more chance. So far no Freshmen candidates had been called, but the head coach was heard to whisper to Green:

"We'd better work this fellow Morton with the squad until the cubs start. He'll stand a lot of practice. Give him all the football he'll hold. He's outkicking his ends now. Jack him up without cutting down his distance. I'd like to see him make a tackle. He looks good at the dummy, but you never can tell. He may

be an ear-puller."

The magic words slipped through the town. George caught arriving Freshmen pointing him out. He overheard glowing prophecies.

"Green says he'll outkick Dewitt."

It didn't turn his head. To be the greatest player the game had ever known wouldn't have turned his head, for that would have been only one small step toward the summit from which Sylvia looked down on him with contemptuous, inimical eyes.

The head coach one afternoon gave the ball to a young man of no pronounced value, and instructed him to elude George if he could.

"You, Morton," the head coach instructed, "see that he doesn't get past you. Remember what you've done to the dummy."

George nodded, realizing that this was a real test to be passed with a hundred per cent. That man with the ball had the power and the desire to make a miserable failure of him. For the moment he seemed more than a man, deadly, to be conquered at any cost. Schooled by his rough-and-tumble combats at school and in the stables, George kept his glance on the other's eyes; knew, therefore, when he was going to side-step, and in which direction; lunged at exactly the right moment; clipped the runner about the knees; lifted him; brought him crashing to the ground. The ball rolled to one side. George released his man, sprawled, and gathered the ball in his arms. A great silence descended on the field. Out of it, as George got up, slipped the uncertain voice of his victim.

"Did anything break off, Green? That wasn't a tackle. It was a bad accident. How could I tell he was a bull when he didn't wear horns?"

George helped the man to his feet.

"Hope I didn't hurt you."

"Oh, no. I'll be all right again in a couple of months."

He limped about his work, muttering:

"Maybe mother was right when she didn't want me to play this game."

The coach wasn't through. He gave the ball to George and signalled one of the biggest of the varsity men.

"Let me see you get past that fellow, Morton."

George didn't get past, although, with the tackler's vise-like grip about his legs, he struggled with knees and elbows, and kept his feet until the coach called to let him go.

"I'm sorry," George began.

"Yes," Green said, severely, "you've got to learn to get past tacklers. If you learn to do that consistently I'll guarantee you a place on the team, provided Mr. Stringham's willing."

"I'm willing," the head coach said with apparent reluctance.

Everyone within hearing laughed, but George couldn't laugh, although he knew it was expected.

"Mr. Stringham," he said, "I will learn to get past them unless they come too thick."

The coach patted his shoulder. His voice was satisfied.

"Run along to the showers now."

There may have been something in the sequence of these events, for that very night Squibs Bailly's face twitched with satisfaction.

"You have a share," he said, "in the agency of the laundry most generally patronized by our young men. It will pay you enough unless you long for automobiles and gaiety."

"No," George said, "but, Mr. Bailly, I need clothes. I can afford to buy some now. Where shall I go? What shall I get?"

Bailly limped about thoughtfully. He named a tailor of the town. He prescribed an outing suit and a dinner suit.

"Because," he said, "if you're asked about, you want to be able to go, and a dinner suit will pass for a Freshman nearly anywhere."

"If," George asked himself defiantly as he walked home, "Squibs thinks my ambition unworthy, why does he go out of his way to boost it? Anyway, I'm going to do my best to make touchdowns for him and Mrs. Squibs. Is that Princeton spirit, or Bailly spirit, or am I fooling myself, and am I going to make touchdowns just for myself and Sylvia Planter?"

VII

The meeting he had desired above all things to avoid took place when he was, for a moment, off his guard. He was on his way to Dickinson Hall for his first

examination. Perhaps that was why he was too absorbed to notice the automobile drawn up at the curb just ahead, and facing him. He had no warning. He nearly collided with Lambert Planter, who walked out of a shop. George stopped, drew back, and thought of dodging behind the procession of worried, sombrely clothed Freshmen; but there wasn't time. Lambert's face showed bewilderment and recognition.

"Certainly it is Mr. Morton," he said in his old mocking fashion.

George glanced at the surprised features which, in a masculine fashion, were reminiscent of Sylvia; and beyond he saw, in the rear seat of the automobile, Sylvia herself, lovelier, more removed than ever. Betty Alston sat at her side. Evidently neither had observed the encounter, for they laughed and chatted, probably about the terror-stricken Freshmen.

George swallowed hard.

"I heard you were going to be here. I wanted to keep out of your way."

"But why?" Lambert laughed. "You have a scholastic appearance. You never mean——"

"I am taking my entrance examinations," George said. "I want to make good here."

He looked straight into Lambert's eyes. His voice became incisive, threatening.

"I will make good. Don't try giving me away. Don't you tell Miss Alston where I came from——"

"Yeh. The big fellow! Morton! Stringham and Green

say he's going to be a wonder."

It drifted to them from the passing youths.

Lambert whistled. The mockery left his voice.

"Go as far as you can," he said.

And followed it with:

"Don't be a self-conscious ass."

He smiled whimsically.

"Glad to have run into you—George."

The driver had noticed Lambert. The automobile glided nearer.

"I—I've got to get away," George said, hastily. "I don't want your sister to see me."

Lambert turned. His voice, in turn, was a trifle threatening.

"That's all nonsense. She's forgotten all about you; she wouldn't know you from Adam."

George couldn't help staring. What a contrast the two young women offered! He wanted to realize that he actually looked at Sylvia Planter, Sylvia of the flesh, Sylvia who had expressed for him an endless contempt. But he couldn't help seeing also the golden hair and the soft colouring of Betty Alston.

Lambert sprang into the car. Sylvia and Betty both glanced at the man he had left. George waited. What would happen now? Sylvia's colour did not heighten. Her eyes did not falter. Betty smiled and waved her hand. George took off his cap, still expectant. Sylvia's lifeless stare continued until the car had rolled away.

George sighed, relaxed, and went on.

Had Lambert been right? He didn't want to believe that. It hurt too much.

"She saw me," he muttered. "She stared, not as if she saw an unknown man, but as if she wanted to make me think she saw nothing. She saw me."

But he couldn't be sure. It seemed to him then that he wanted more than anything in the world to be sure.

And he had not taken advantage of his chance. Instead of looking at her and fixing the stark fact of hatred in his mind, he had only thought with an angry, craving desire:

"You are the loveliest thing in the world. The next time you'll know me. By God, the next time I'll *make* you know me."

VIII

In the examination hall George called upon his will to drive from his mind the details of that encounter. Lambert might be dependable, but if Sylvia had actually recognized him what might she not say to Betty Alston? He didn't want to see the kindness vanish from Betty's eyes, nor the friendliness from her manner. Lambert's assurance, moreover, that Sylvia had forgotten him lingered irritatingly.

"I will not think of it," George told himself. "I will think of nothing but this paper. I will pass it."

This ability to discipline his mind had increased steadily during his hours before Sylvia's portrait. The simple command "I will," was a necessity his brain

met with a decreasing reluctance. For two hours now it excluded everything except his work. At the end of that time he signed his paper, sat back, and examined the anxious young men crowded about him in the long room. From these he must sooner or later detach the ones of value to himself. That first quick appraisal disclosed little; they were clothed too much to a pattern, wearing black jerseys, more often than not, black clothes, with black caps hanging from the supports of their chairs. In their faces, however, were visible differences that made him uneasy. Even from a uniform, then, men, to an extent, projected discrepancies of birth, or training, or habit. He sighed and turned in his paper.

At the foot of the stairs groups collected, discussing the ordeal pessimistically. As he started to walk through, several spoke to George.

"How did *you* hit it, Morton?"

Already he was well spotted. He paused and joined the apprehensive chatter.

"It's a toss-up with me," Rogers admitted. "Don't tell me any answers. If ignorance is bliss, I want to stay dumb."

He caught George's arm.

"Have you met Dicky Goodhue? Hello, Goodhue!"

Goodhue gave the impression of not having met Rogers to any extent. He was a sturdy young man with handsome, finely formed features. George looked at him closely, because this young man alone of the Freshmen he had met remained unmoved by his fame.

"Would like you to meet Morton, Goodhue."

Goodhue glanced at George inquiringly, almost resentfully.

"George Morton," Rogers stumbled on, as if an apology were necessary. "Stringham, you know, and Green——"

"Glad to meet you," Goodhue said, indifferently.

"Thanks," George acknowledged as indifferently, and turned away.

Goodhue, it came upon him with a new appreciation of difficulties, was the proper sort. He watched him walk off with a well-dressed, weak-looking youth, threading a careless course among his classmates.

"How long have you known this fellow Goodhue?" George asked as he crossed the campus with Rogers.

"Oh, Goodhue?" Rogers said, uncomfortably. "I've seen him any number of times. Ran into him last night."

"Good-looking man," George commented. "Where's he come from?"

"You don't know who Dicky Goodhue is!" Rogers cried. "I mean, you must have heard of his father anyway, the old Richard. Real Estate for generations. Money grows for them without their turning a hand. Dicky's up at the best clubs in New York. Plays junior polo on Long Island."

George had heard enough.

"If I do as well with the other exams," he said, "I'm going to get in."

With Freshmen customs what they were, he was thinking, he could appear as well dressed as the Goodhue crowd. He would take pains with that.

He passed Goodhue on his way to the examination hall that afternoon, and Goodhue didn't remember him. The incident made George thoughtful. Was football going to prove the all-powerful lever he had fancied? At any rate, Rogers' value was at last established.

He reported that evening to Bailly:

"I think it's all right so far."

The tutor grinned.

"To-day's beyond recall, but to-morrow's the future, and it cradles, among other dragons, French."

He pointed out passages in a number of books.

"Wrestle with those until midnight," he counselled, "and then go to sleep. Day after to-morrow we'll hope you can apply your boot to a football again."

Mrs. Bailly stopped him in the hall.

"How did it go?" she asked, eagerly.

Her anxiety had about it something maternal. It gave him for the first time a feeling of being at home in Princeton.

"I got through to-day," he said.

"Good! Good!"

She nodded toward the study.

"Then you have made him very happy."

"I always want to," George said. "That's a worthy ambition, isn't it?"

She looked at him gropingly, as if she almost caught his allusion.

IX

As George let himself out of the gate a closed automobile turned the corner and drew up at the curb. The driver sprang down and opened the door. Betty Alston's white-clad figure emerged and crossed the sidewalk while George pulled off his cap and held the gate open for her. He suffered an ugly suspense. What would she say? Would she speak to him at all? Phrases that Sylvia might have used to her flashed through his mind; then he saw her smile as usual. She held out her hand. The warmth of her fingers seemed to reach his mind, making it less unyielding. The fancy put him on his guard.

"I know you passed," she said.

He walked with her across the narrow yard to the porch.

"I think so, to-day."

She paused with her foot on the lower step. The light from the corner disclosed her face, puzzled and undecided; and his uneasiness returned.

"I am just returning this," she said, holding up a book. "I'd be glad to drop you at your lodging——"

"I'll wait."

While she was inside he paced the sidewalk. There had been a question in her face, but not the vital

one, which, indeed, she wouldn't have troubled to ask. Sylvia had not recognized him, or, recognizing him, had failed to give him away.

Betty came gracefully down the steps, and George followed her into the pleasant obscurity of the automobile. He could scarcely see her white figure, but he became aware again of the delightful and singular perfume of her tawny hair. If Sylvia had spoken he never could have sat so close to her. He had no business, anyway——

She snapped on the light. She laughed.

"I said you were bound to meet Lambert Planter."

He had started on false ground. At any moment the ground might give way.

"If I wasn't quite honest about that the other morning," he said, "it was because I had met Lambert Planter, but under circumstances I wanted to forget."

"I'm sorry," she said, softly, "that I reminded you; but he seemed glad to see you this morning. It is all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered, doubtfully.

That thrilling quality of her voice became more pronounced.

"I'm glad. For he's a good friend to have. He's a very real person; I mean, a man who's likely to do big things, don't you think?"

"Yes," he said again.

Why was he conscious of resentment? Why did he ask himself quickly if Lambert thought of her with

equal benevolence? He pulled himself up short. What earthly business was it of his what Betty Alston and Lambert Planter thought of each other? But he regretted the briefness of his companionship with Betty in the unaccustomed luxury of the car. It surrounded him with a settled and congenial atmosphere; it lessened, after the first moments, the sharp taste of the ambition to which he had condemned himself.

"Don't worry," she said, as he descended at his lodging, "you'll get in. Dear old Squibs told me so."

He experienced a strong impulse to touch her hand again. He thanked her, said good-night, and turned resolutely away.

It was only after long scrutiny of Sylvia's photograph that he attacked Bailly's marked passages. Again and again he reminded himself that he had actually seen her that day, and that she had either not remembered him, or had, with a deliberate cruelty, sought to impress him with his ugly insignificance in a crowded and pleasurable landscape.

Then why should this other girl of the same class treat him so differently?

The answer came glibly. For that instant he was wholly distasteful to himself.

"Because she doesn't know."

He picked up a piece of the broken riding crop, flushing hotly. He would detach himself from the landscape for Sylvia. He would use that crop yet.

X

He worked all the next day in the examination hall. He purposely chose a seat in the row behind Goodhue. Five or six men, clearly all friends of Goodhue's, sat near him, each modelled more or less as he was. George noticed one exception, a short fellow who stood out from the entire room. At first George thought it was because he was older, then he decided it was the light moustache, the thick hair, the eyes that lacked lustre, the long, white fingers. The man barely lifted his examination sheets. He glanced at them once, then set to work. He was the first to rise and hand his papers in. The rest paused, stared enviously, and sighed. George heard Goodhue say to the man next him:

"How do you suppose Spike does it?"

George wondered why they called the dainty little man Spike.

He was slow and painstaking himself, and the room was fairly well emptied before he finished. Except for the French, he was satisfied. He took a deep breath. The ordeal was over. For the first time in more than two months he was his own master. He could do anything he pleased.

First of all, he hurried to Squibs Bailly.

"Lend me a novel—something exciting," he began. "No, I wouldn't open a text-book even for you to-night. The schedule's dead and buried, sir, and you haven't given me another."

Bailly's wrinkled face approved.

"You wouldn't be coming at me this way if there was any doubt. You shall have your novel. I'm afraid——"

He paused, laughing.

"I mean, my task with you is about done. You've more brain than a dinosaur. It is variously wrinkled where once it was like a babe's. Except for the French, you should handle your courses without superhuman effort. Don't ever let me hear of your getting a condition. Your next schedule will come from Stringham and Green."

He limped to a bookcase and drew out a volume bound in red.

"Without entirely wasting your time, you may amuse yourself with that."

"'Treasure Island.'"

George frowned doubtfully.

"We studied something about this man. If he's good enough to get in the school books maybe he isn't just what I'm looking for to-night."

"Have you ever perused Nick Carter, or, perhaps Old Sleuth?" Bailly asked.

George smiled.

"I know I have to forget all that."

"In intellectual circles," Bailly agreed.

He glanced slyly around.

"I've scanned such matter," he whispered, "with a modicum of enjoyment, so I can assure you the book you have in your hand possesses nearly equal merit, yet you may discuss it without losing caste in the most exalted places; which would seem to indicate that human judgment is based on manner rather than

matter."

"You mean," George said, frowning, "that if a man does a rotten thing it is the way he does it rather than the thing itself that is judged?"

Bailly limped up and down, his hands behind his back. He faced George with a little show of bewildered temper.

"See here, Freshman Morton, I've taught you to think too fast. You can't fasten a scheme of ethics on any silly aphorism of mine. Go home and read your book. Dwell with picturesque pirates, and walk with flawless and touching virtue. Delve for buried treasure. That, at least, is always worth while."

George's attitude was a challenge.

"Remembering," he said, softly, "to dig in a nice manner even if your hands do get dirty."

Bailly sprawled in his chair and waved George away. "You need a preacher," he said, "not a tutor."

XI

In his room George opened his book and read happily. Never in his life had he been so relaxed and content. Entangled in the adventures of colourful characters he didn't hear at first the sliding of stealthy feet in the hall, whispered consultations, sly knockings at various doors. Then there came a rap at his own door, and he glanced up, surprised, sweeping the photograph and the broken crop into the table drawer.

"Come in," he called, not heartily.

A dozen young men crowded slowly into the room. They wore orange and black jerseys and caps brilliant with absurd devices. They had the appearance of judges of some particularly atrocious criminal. George had no doubt that he was the man, for those were the days just before hazing was frowned out of existence by an effete conservatism.

"Get up, you Freshman," one hissed. "Put on your hat and coat, and follow us."

George was on the point of refusing, had his hands half up in fact, to give them a fight; but a thrill entered his soul that he should be qualified as a victim of such high-handed nonsense which acknowledged him as an entity in the undergraduate world. He arose gladly, ready to obey. Then someone grunted with disgust.

"Come on. Duck out of here."

"What for? This guy looks fresh as salt mackerel."

"It's Morton. We can't monkey with him."

The others expressed disappointment and thronged through the door in search of victims more available. George became belligerent for an opposite reason.

"Why not?" he demanded.

The leader smiled in friendly fashion.

"You'll get all the hazing you need down at the field."

As the last filed out and closed the door George smiled appreciation. Even among the Sophomores he was spotted, a privileged and an important character.

The next morning, packed with the nervous

Freshmen in a lecture room, he heard his name read out with the sections. He fought his way into the university offices to scan the list of conditioned men. He didn't appear on a single slip. He had even managed the easy French paper. He attended to the formalities of matriculating. He was free to play football, to take up the by-no-means considerable duties of the laundry agency, to make friends. He had completed the first lap.

When he reported at the field that afternoon he found that the Freshmen had a coach of their own, a young man who possessed the unreal violence of a Sophomore, but he knew the game, and the extra invective with which he drove George indicated that Stringham and Green had confided to him their hopes.

The squad was large. Later it would dwindle and its members be thrown into a more intimate contact. Goodhue was there, a promising quarterback. Rogers toiled with a hopeless enthusiasm. George smiled, appreciating the other's logic. It was a good thing to try for the team, even though one had no chance of making it. As a matter of fact, Rogers disappeared at the first weeding-out.

The opening fortnight was wholly pleasant—a stressing of fundamentals that demanded little severe physical effort. Nor did the curriculum place any grave demands on George. During the evenings he frequently supplemented his work at the field with a brisk cross-country run, more often than not in the vicinity of the Alston place. He could see the lights in the huge house, and he tried to visualize that interior where, perhaps, men of the Goodhue stamp sat with Betty. He studied those fortunates, meantime, and

the other types that surrounded him. There were many men of a sort, of the Rogers sort particularly, who continually suggested their receptivity; and he was invariably courteous—from a distance, as he had seen Goodhue respond to Rogers. For George had his eyes focused now. He had seen the best.

The election of Freshmen class officers outlined several facts. The various men put up for office were unknown to the class in general, were backed by little crowds from their own schools. Men from less important schools, and men, like George, with no preparatory past, voted wild. These school groups, he saw, clung together; would determine, it was clear, the social progress through college of their members. That inevitably pointed to the upper-class club houses on Prospect Street. George had seen them from his first days at University Field, but until now they had, naturally enough, failed to impress him with any immediate interest. He desired the proper contacts for the molding of his own deportment and, to an extent even greater, for the bearing they would have on his battle for money and position after he should leave college. But it became clear to him now that the contest for Prospect Street had begun on the first day, even earlier, back in the preparatory schools.

Were such contacts possible in a serviceable measure without success in that selfish, headlong race? Was it practicable to draw the attention of the eager, half-blind runners to one outside the sacred little groups? Football would open certain doors, but if there was one best club he would have that or nothing. It might be wiser to stand brazenly aloof, posing as above such infantile jealousies. The future would decide, but as he left the place of the elections he

had an empty feeling, a sharpened appreciation of the hazards that lay ahead.

Goodhue would be pointed for the highest. Goodhue would lead in many ways. He was elected the first president of the class.

The poor or earnest men, ignorant of everything outside their books, come from scattered homes, quite friendless, gravitated together in what men like Rogers considered a social quarantine. Rogers, indeed, ventured to warn George of the risk of contagion. As chance dictated George chatted with such creatures; once or twice even walked across the campus with them.

"You're making a mistake," Rogers advised, "being seen with polers like Allen."

"I've been seen with him twice that I can think of," George answered. "Why?"

"That lot'll queer you."

George put his hand on Rogers' shoulder.

"See here. If I'm so small that that will queer me, you can put me down as damned."

He walked on with that infrequently experienced sensation of having made an advance. Yet he couldn't quite see why. He had responded to an instinct that must have been his even in the days at Oakmont, when he had been less than human. If he didn't see more of men like Allen it was because they had nothing to offer him; nothing whatever. Goodhue had——

When their paths crossed on the campus now Goodhue nodded, for each day they met at the field,

both certainties, if they escaped injury, for the Freshmen eleven.

Football had ceased to be unalloyed pleasure. Stringham that fall used the Freshmen rather more than the scrub as a punching bag for the varsity. The devoted youngsters would take punishment from three or four successive teams from the big squad. They became, consequently, as hard as iron. Frequently they played a team of varsity substitutes off its feet. George had settled into the backfield. He was fast with the ball, but he found it difficult to follow his interference, losing patience sometimes, and desiring to cut off by himself. Even so he made consistent gains through the opposing line. On secondary defence he was rather too efficient. Stringham was continually cautioning him not to tackle the varsity pets too viciously. After one such rebuke Goodhue unbent to sympathy.

"If they worked the varsity as hard as they do us Stringham wouldn't have to be so precious careful of his brittle backs. Just the same, Morton, I would rather play with you than against you."

George smiled, but he didn't bother to answer. Let Goodhue come around again.

George's kicking from the start outdistanced the best varsity punts. The stands, sprinkled with undergraduates and people from the town, would become noisy with handclapping as his spirals arched down the field.

Squibs Bailly, George knew, was always there, probably saying, "I kicked that ball. I made that run," and he had. The more you thought of it, the more it became comprehensible that he had.

The afternoon George slipped outside a first varsity tackle, and dodged two varsity backs, running forty yards for a touchdown, Squibs limped on the field, followed by Betty Alston. The scrimmaging was over. The Freshmen, triumphant because of George's feat, streaked toward the field house. Goodhue ran close to George. Bailly caught George's arm. Goodhue paused, calling out:

"Hello, Betty!"

At first Betty seemed scarcely to see Goodhue. She held out her hand to George.

"That was splendid. Don't forget that you're going to make me congratulate you this way next fall after the big games."

"I'll do my best. I want you to," George said.

Again he responded to the frank warmth of her fingers that seemed unconsciously endeavouring to make more pliable the hard surface of his mind.

"The strength of a lion," Bailly was saying, "united to the cruel cunning of the serpent. Heaven be praised you didn't seek the higher education at Yale or Harvard."

Betty called a belated greeting to Goodhue.

"Hello, Dicky! Wasn't it a real run? I feel something of a sponsor. I told him before college opened he would be a great player."

Goodhue's surprise was momentarily apparent.

"It was rather nice to see those big fellows dumped," he said.

Betty went closer to him.

"Aren't you coming out to dinner soon? I'll promise Green you won't break training."

The warm, slender fingers were no longer at George's mind. He felt abruptly repulsed. He wanted only to get away. Her eyes caught his, and she smiled.

"And bring Mr. Morton. I'm convinced he'll never come unless somebody takes him by the hand."

George glanced at her hand. He had a whimsical impulse to reach out for it, to close his eyes, to be led.

Heavy feet hurried behind the little group. A voice filled with rancour and disgust cried out:

"You standing here without blankets just to enjoy the autumn breezes? You ought to have better sense, Mr. Bailly."

"It's my fault, Green," Betty laughed.

"That's different," the trainer admitted, gallantly. "You can't expect a woman to have much sense. Get to the showers now, and on the run."

Goodhue and George trotted off.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Betty Alston's," Goodhue said.

George didn't answer. Goodhue didn't say anything else.

XII

Often after those long, pounding afternoons George

returned to his room, wondering dully, as he had done last summer, why the deuce he did it. Sylvia's picture stared the same answer, and he would turn with a sigh to one of the novels Bailly loaned him regularly. Bailly was of great value there, too, for he chose the books carefully, and George was commencing to learn that as a man reads so is he very likely to think. Whenever he spoke now he was careful to modulate his voice, to choose his words, never to be heard without a reason.

The little fellow with the moustache whom the Goodhue crowd called Spike met him on the campus one day after practice.

"My name," he announced in a high-pitched, slurred voice, "is Wandel. You may not realize it, but you are a very great man, Morton."

George looked him over, astonished. He had difficulty not to mock the other's manner, nearly effeminate.

"Why am I great, Mr. Wandel?"

"Anybody," Wandel answered in his singing voice, "who does one thing better than others is inevitably great."

George smiled vindictively.

"I suppose I ought to return the compliment. What do you do?"

Wandel wasn't ruffled.

"Very many things. I brew good tea for one. What about a cup now? Come to my rooms. They're just here, in Blair tower."

George weighed the invitation. Wandel was beyond doubt of the fortunates, yet curiously apart from them. George's diplomacy required a forcing of the fortunates to seek him. Wandel, for that matter, had sought. Where George might have refused a first invitation from Goodhue he accepted Wandel's, because he was anxious to know the man's real purpose in asking him.

"All right. Thanks. But I haven't much time. I want to do some reading before dinner."

He hadn't imagined anything like Wandel's room existed in college, or could be conceived or executed by one of college age. The study was large and high with a broad casement window. The waning light increased the values Wandel had evidently sought. The wall covering and the draperies at the three doors and the window were a dead shade of green that, in fact, suggested a withdrawal from life nearly supernatural, at least medieval. The half-dozen pictures were designed to complete this impression. They were primitives—an awkward but lovely Madonna, a procession of saints who seemed deformed by their experiences, grotesque conceptions of biblical encounters. There were heavy rugs, also green in foundation; and, with wide, effective spaces between, stood uncomfortable Gothic chairs, benches, and tables.

Two months ago George would have expressed amazement, perhaps admiration. Now he said nothing, but he longed for Squibs' opinion of the room. He questioned what it reflected of the pompous little man who had brought him.

Wandel stooped and lighted the fire. He switched the heavy green curtains over the window. In a corner a

youth stirred and yawned.

"Hello, Dalrymple," Wandel said. "Waited long? You know that very great man, Morton?"

The increasing firelight played on Dalrymple's face, a countenance without much expression, intolerant, if anything, but in a far weaker sense than Sylvia's assurance. George recognized him. He had seen him accompany Goodhue through the crowd the day of the first examination. Dalrymple didn't disturb himself.

"The football player? How do. Damn tea, Spike. You've got whiskey and a siphon."

George's hand had been ready. He was thankful he hadn't offered it. In that moment a dislike was born, not very positive; the emotion one has for an unwholesome animal.

Wandel disappeared. After a moment he came in, wearing a fantastic embroidered dressing gown of the pervading dead green tone. He lighted a spirit lamp, and, while the water heated, got out a tea canister, cups, boxes of biscuits, cigarettes, bottles, and glasses. Dalrymple poured a generous drink. Wandel took a smaller one.

"You," he said to George, "being a very great man, will have some tea."

"I'll have some tea, anyway," George answered.

The door opened. Goodhue strolled in. His eyebrows lifted when he saw George.

"Do you know you're in bad company, Morton?"

"I believe so," George answered.

Wandel was pleased. George saw Goodhue glance a question at Dalrymple. Dalrymple merely stared.

They sat about, sipping, talking of nothing in particular, and the curious room was full of an interrogation. George lost his earlier fancy of being under Wandel's inspection. It was evident to him now that Wandel was the man to do his inspecting first. Why the deuce had he asked him here? Dalrymple and Goodhue were clearly puzzled by the same question.

When he had emptied his cup George rose and put on his cap.

"Thanks for the cup of tea, Wandel."

"Don't go," Wandel urged.

He waved his hands helplessly.

"But, since you're a very distinguished person, I suppose I can't keep you. Come again, any day this time. Every day."

The question in Goodhue's eyes increased. Dalrymple altered his position irritably, and refilled his glass. George didn't say good-bye, waiting for the first move from him. Dalrymple, however, continued to sip, unaffected by this departure.

Goodhue, on the other hand, after a moment's hesitation, followed George out. When they had reached the tower archway Goodhue paused. The broken light from an iron-framed lamp exposed the curiosity and indecision in his eyes.

"Have you any idea, Morton," he asked, "what Spike's up to with you; I mean, why he's so darned hospitable all of a sudden?"

George shook his head. He was quite frank.

"I'm not so dull," he said, "that I haven't been wondering about that myself."

Goodhue smiled, and unexpectedly held out his hand.

"Good-night, see you at the field to-morrow."

"Why," George asked as he released that coveted grasp, "do you call Wandel 'Spike'?"

Goodhue's voice was uneasy in spite of the laugh with which he coloured it.

"Maybe it's because he's so sharp."

XIII

George saw a day or two later a professor's criticism in the *Daily Princetonian* of the current number of the *Nassau Literary Magazine*. Driggs Wandel, because of a poem, was excitedly greeted as a man with a touch of genius. George borrowed a copy of the *Lit* from a neighbour, and read a haunting, unreal bit of verse that seemed a part of the room in which it had probably been written. Obsessed by the practicality of the little man, George asked himself just what Wandel had to gain by this performance. He carried the whole puzzle to Bailly that night, and was surprised to learn that Wandel had impressed himself already on the faculty.

"This verse isn't genius," Bailly said, "but it proves that the man has an abnormal control of effect, and he does what he does with no apparent effort. He'll probably be managing editor of the *Lit* and the *Princetonian*, for I understand he's out for that, too.

He's going to make himself felt in his class and in the entire undergraduate body. Don't undervalue him. Have you stopped to think, Morton, that he still wears a moustache? Revolutionary! Has he overawed the Sophomores, or has he too many friends in the upper classes?"

Bailly limped up and down, ill at ease, seeking words.

"I don't know how to advise you. I believe he'll help you delve after some treasure, though the stains on his own hands won't be visible. Whether it's just the treasure you want is another matter. Be inscrutable yourself. Accept his invitations. If you can, find out what he's up to without committing yourself. You can put it down that he isn't after you for nothing."

"But why?" George demanded.

Bailly shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Anyway, I've told you what I could, and you'll go your own way whether you agree or not."

George did, as a matter of fact. His curiosity carried him a number of times to Wandel's rooms. Practically always Dalrymple sat aloof, sullenly sipping whiskey which had no business there. He met a number of other men of the same crowd who talked football in friendly enough fashion; and once or twice the suave little fellow made a point of asking him for a particular day or hour. Always Wandel would introduce him to some new man, offering him, George felt, as a specimen to be accepted as a triumph of the Wandel judgment. And in every fresh face George saw the question he continually asked himself.

Wandel's campaign accomplished one result: Men like Rogers became more obsequious, considering George already a unit of that hallowed circle. But George wasn't fooled. He knew very well that he wasn't.

Goodhue, however, was more friendly. Football, after all, George felt, was quite as responsible for that as Betty Alston or Wandel; for it was the combination of Goodhue at quarter and George at half that accounted for the team's work against the varsity, and that beat the Yale and the Harvard Freshmen. Such a consistent and effectual partnership couldn't help drawing its members closer out of admiration, out of joy in success, out of a ponderable dependence that each learned to place upon the other. That conception survived the Freshman season. George no longer felt he had to be careful with Goodhue. Goodhue had even found his lodgings.

"Not palatial," George explained, "because—you may not know it—I am working my way through college."

Goodhue's voice was a trifle envious.

"I know. It must give you a fine feeling to do that."

Then Betty's vague invitation materialized in a note which mentioned a date and the fact that Goodhue would be there. Goodhue himself suggested that George should call at his rooms that evening so they could drive out together. George had never been before, had not suspected that Dalrymple lived with Goodhue. The fact, learned at the door, which bore the two cards, disquieted him, filled him with a sense nearly premonitory.

When he had entered in response to Goodhue's call

his doubt increased. The room seemed inimical to him, yet it was a normal enough place. What did it harbour that he was afraid of, that he was reluctant even to look for?

Goodhue was nearly ready. Dalrymple lounged on a window seat. He glanced at George languidly.

"Will say, Morton, you did more than your share against those Crimson Freshmen Saturday."

George nodded without answering. He had found the object the room contained for which he had experienced a premonitory fear. On one of the two desks stood an elaborately framed replica of the portrait he himself possessed of Sylvia Planter. Its presence there impressed him as a wrong, for to study and commune with that pictured face he had fancied his unique privilege. Nor did its presence in this room seem quite honest, for Sylvia, he was willing to swear, wasn't the type to scatter her likenesses among young men. George had an instinct to turn on Dalrymple and demand a history of the print, since Goodhue, he was certain, wouldn't have placed it there without authority. After all, such authority might exist. What did he know of Sylvia aside from her beauty, her arrogance, and her breeding? That was it. Her breeding made the exposure of her portrait here questionable.

"What you staring at?" Dalrymple asked, sullenly.

"Is this your desk?" George demanded.

"Yes. Why?"

George faced him abruptly.

"I was looking at that photograph."

"What for?" Dalrymple demanded, sitting up.

"Because," George answered, evenly, "it happens to be where one sees it."

Dalrymple flushed.

"Deuced pretty girl," he said with an affectation of indifference. "Of course you don't know her."

"I have seen her," George said, shortly.

He felt that a challenge had been passed and accepted. He raised his voice.

"How about it, Goodhue?"

"Coming."

Dalrymple opened his mouth as if to speak, but Goodhue slipped into the room, and George and he went down the stairs and climbed into Goodhue's runabout.

"I didn't know," George said when they had started, "that you lived with Dalrymple."

"We were put together at school, so it seemed simple to start out here."

George was glad to fancy a slight colour of apology, as if such a companionship needed a reason.

It was a pleasant and intimate little dinner to which they drove. Mr. and Mrs. Alston recollected meeting George at the Baillys', and they were kind about his football. A friend of Betty's from a neighbouring house made the sixth. George was not uncomfortable. His glass had shown him that in a dinner suit he was rather better looking than he had thought. Observation had diminished his dread of

social lapses. There flowed, however, rather too much talk of strange worlds, which included some approaching gaieties in New York.

"You," Betty said casually to him, "must run up to my great affair."

Her aunt, it appeared, would engineer that a short time before the holidays. George was vague. The prospect of a ballroom was terrifying. He had danced very little, and never with the type of women who would throng Betty Alston's début. Yet he wanted to go.

"Betty," her mother said, dryly, "will have all the lions she can trap."

George received an unpleasant impression of having been warned. It didn't affect him strongly, because warnings were wasted there; he was too much the slave of a photograph and a few intolerable memories. Sylvia would almost certainly be at that dance.

Wandel appeared after dinner.

"I tried to get Dolly to come," he said, "but he was in a most villainous temper about something, and couldn't be budged. Don't mind saying he missed a treat. I hired a pert little mare at Marlin's. If I can find anything in town nearly as good I'll break the two to tandem this winter."

George's suppressed enthusiasm blazed.

"I'd like to help you. I'd give a good deal for a real fight with a horse."

He was afraid he had plunged in too fast. He met the surprise of the others by saying he had played here

and there with other people's horses; but the conversation had drifted to a congenial topic, and it got to polo.

"Because a man was killed here once," Wandel said, "is no reason why the game should be damned forever."

"If you young men," Mr. Alston offered, "want to get some ponies down in the spring, or experiment with what I've got, you're welcome to play here all you please, and it might be possible to arrange games with scrub teams from Philadelphia and New York."

"Do you play, Mr. Morton?" Betty asked, interestedly.

"I've scrubbed around," he said, uncertainly.

She laughed.

"Then he's a master. That's what he told dear old Squibs about his football."

George wanted to get away from horses. He could score only through action. Talking was dangerous. He was relieved when he could leave with Goodhue and Wandel.

The runabout scurried out of Wandel's way. The pert little mare sensed a rival in the automobile, and gave Wandel all the practice he wanted. George smiled at the busy little man as his cart slithered from side to side of the driveway.

"That's Spike's one weakness," Goodhue laughed as they hurried off. "He's not a natural horseman, but he loves the beasts, so he takes his falls. By the way, I rather think I can guess what he's up to with you."

"What?" George asked.

Goodhue shook his head.

"Learn from Spike. Anyway, I may be wrong."

Then why had Goodhue spoken at all? To put him on his guard?

"Wandel," George promised himself, "will get away with nothing as far as I am concerned."

Yet all that night the thought of the little man made him uncomfortable.

XIV

George watched his first big varsity game the following Saturday. It was the last of the season, against Yale. He sat with Goodhue and other members of the Freshman eleven in an advantageous part of the stands. The moment the blue squad, greeted by a roar, trotted on the field, he recognized Lambert Planter's rangy figure. Lambert's reputation as a fullback had come to Princeton ahead of him, and it had scarcely been exaggerated. Once he had torn through the line he gave the Princeton backs all they wanted to do. He kicked for Yale. Defensively he was the deadliest man on the field. He, George and Goodhue agreed, would determine the outcome. As, through him, the balance of the contest commenced to tip, George experienced a biting restlessness. It wasn't the prospect of the defeat of Princeton by Yale that angered him so much as the fact that Lambert Planter would unquestionably be the cause. George felt it unjust that rules should exist excluding him from that bruising and muddy contest. More than anything else just then he wanted to be on the field, stopping Planter, avoiding the reluctance of such an issue.

"We ought to be out there, Morton," Goodhue muttered. "If nothing happens, we will be next year."

"It's that fellow Planter," George answered. "He could be stopped."

"You could stop him," Goodhue said. "You could outkick him."

George's face was grim.

"I'm stronger than Planter," he said, simply. "I could beat him."

The varsity, however, couldn't. Lambert, during the last quarter, slipped over the line for the deciding touchdown. The game ended in a dusky and depressing autumn haze. George and Goodhue watched sullenly the enemy hosts carry Planter and the other blue players about the field. Appearing as if they had survived a disaster, they joined the crowd of men and women, relatives and friends of the players, near the field house. The vanquished and the substitutes had already slipped through and out of sight. The first of the steaming Yale men appeared and threaded a path toward the steps. Lambert, because he had been honoured most, was the last to arrive, and at that moment out of the multitude there came into George's vision faces that he knew, as if they had waited to detach themselves for this spectacular advent.

He saw the most impressive one first of all, and he stood, as he had frequently stood before her portrait, staring in a mood of wilful obstinacy. It was only for a few moments, and she was quite some distance away. Before he could appreciate the chance, she had withdrawn herself, after a quick, approving tap

of her brother's shoulder, among the curious, crowding people. George had seen her face glow with a happy pride in spite of her effort at repression; but in the second face which he noticed there was no emotion visible at all. The hero's mother simply nodded. Dalrymple stood between mother and daughter, smiling inanely.

Lambert forged ahead, filthy and wet. The steam, like vapour from an overworked animal, wavered about him. The Baillys and the Alstons pushed close to George and Goodhue, who were in Lambert's path, pressed there and held by the anxious people.

At sight of Betty, Lambert paused and stretched out his hand. She was, George thought, whiter than ever.

"You'll say hello even to an Eli?"

She gave her hand quickly, the colour invading her pallor. For an instant George thought Lambert was going to draw her closer, saw his lips twitch, heard him say:

"Don't hold it against me, Betty."

Certainly something was understood between these two, or Lambert, at least, believed so.

Betty freed her hand and caught at George's arm.

"Look at him," she said clearly, indicating Planter. "You're going to take care of him next fall. You're not going to let him laugh at us again."

George managed a smile.

"I'll take care of him, Miss Alston."

Lambert's dirty face expanded.

"These are threats! And it's—George. Then we're to have a return bout next fall. I'll look forward to it. Hello, Dick. Good-bye, Betty. Till next fall—George."

He passed on, leaving an impression of confidence and conquest.

"Why," Betty said, impulsively, in George's ear, "does he speak to you that way? Why does he call you George like that?"

For a moment he looked at her steadily, appealingly.

"It's partly my own fault," he said at last, "but it hurts."

Her voice was softer than before.

"That's wrong. You mustn't let little things hurt, George."

For the first time in his memory he felt a stinging at his eyes, the desire for tears. He didn't misunderstand. Her use of his first name was not a precedent. It had been balm applied to a wound that she had only been able to see was painful. Yet, as he walked away with Goodhue, he felt as if he had been baptized again.

XV

Wandel, quite undisturbed, joined them.

"You and Dicky," the little man said, "look as if you had come out of a bad wreck. What's up? It's only a game."

"Of course you're right," George answered, "but you have to play some games desperately hard if you want to win."

"Now what are you driving at, great man?" Wandel wanted to know.

"Come on, Spike," Goodhue said, irritably. "You're always looking for double meanings."

George walked on with them, desolately aware of many factors of his life gone awry. The game; Lambert's noticeable mockery, all the more unbearable because of its unaffectedness; Dalrymple's adjacence to Sylvia—these remembrances stung, the last most of all.

"Come on up, you two," Goodhue suggested as they approached the building in which he lived, "I believe Dolly's giving tea to Sylvia Planter and her mother."

George wanted to see if the photograph was still there, but he couldn't risk it. He shook his head.

"Not into the camp of the enemy?" Wandel laughed.

Of course, George told himself as he walked off, Wandel's words couldn't possibly have held any double meaning.

He fought it out that night, sleeping scarcely at all.

In the rush of his progress here he had failed to realize how little he had really advanced toward his ultimate goal. Lambert had offhand, perhaps unintentionally, shown him that afternoon how wide the intervening space still stretched. Was it because of moral cowardice that he shrank from challenging a crossing? The answer to such a challenge might easily mean the destruction of all he had built up, the heavy conditioning of his future which now promised so abundantly.

He faced her picture with his eyes resolute, his jaw thrust out.

"I'll do it," he told the lifeless print. "I'll make you know me. I'll teach your brother not to treat me as a servant who has forgotten his place."

The last, in any case, couldn't be safely put off. Lambert's manner had already aroused Betty's interest. Had she known its cause she might not have resented it so sweetly for George. There was no point in fretting any more. His mind was made up to challenge at the earliest possible moment.

In furtherance of his resolution he visited his tailor the next day, and during the evening called at the Baillys'. He came straight to the point.

"I want some dancing lessons," he said. "Do you know anybody?"

Bailly limped up, put his hands on George's shoulder, and studied him.

"Is this traceable to Wandel?"

"No. To what I told you last summer."

"He's going to Betty Alston's dance," Mrs. Bailly cried.

"If I'm asked," George admitted, "but as a general principle——"

Mrs. Bailly interrupted, assuming control.

"Move that table and the chairs," she directed the two men. "You'll keep my husband's secret—tinkling music hidden away between grand opera records. It will come in handy now."

George protested, but she had her own way. Bailly sat by, puffing at his pipe, at first scornful.

"I hate to see a football player pirouetting like a clown."

But in a little while he was up, awkwardly illustrating steps, his cheeks flushed, his cold pipe dangling from his lips.

"You dance very well as it is," Mrs. Bailly told George. "You do need a little quieting. You must learn to remember that the ballroom isn't a gridiron and your partner the ball."

And at the end of a fortnight she told him he was tamed and ready for the soft and perfumed exercise of the dance floor.

He was afraid Betty wouldn't remember. Her invitation had been informal, his response almost a refusal.

On free afternoons Goodhue and he often ran together, trying to keep in condition, already feeling that the outcome of next year's big games would depend on them. They trotted openly through the Alston place, hoping for a glimpse of Betty as a break in their grind. When she saw them from the house she would come out and chat for a time, her yellow

hair straying in the wind, her cheeks flushed from the cold. During these brief conferences it was made clear that she had not forgotten, and that George would go up with Goodhue and be a guest at his home the night of the dance.

George was grateful for that quality of remoteness in Goodhue which at first had irritated him. Now he was well within Goodhue's vision, and acceptably so; but the young man had not shown the slightest interest in his past or his lack of the right friends before coming to Princeton. At any moment he might.

The Goodhue house was uptown between Fifth and Madison avenues. It was as unexpected to George as Wandel's green study had been. The size of its halls and rooms, the tasteful extravagance of its decorations, the quiet, liveried servants took his breath. It was difficult not to say something, to withhold from his glance his admiration and his lack of habit.

There he was at last, handing his hat and coat to one who bent obsequiously. He felt a great contempt. He told himself he was unjust, as unjust as Sylvia, but the contempt persisted.

There were details here more compelling than anything he had seen or fancied at Oakmont. The entire household seemed to move according to a feudal pattern. Goodhue's father and mother welcomed George, because their son had brought him, with a quiet assurance. Mrs. Goodhue, George felt, might even appreciate what he was doing. That was the outstanding, the feudal, quality of both. They had an air of unprejudiced judgment, of removal from any selfish struggle, of being placed

beyond question.

Goodhue and George dined at a club that night. They saw Wandel and Dalrymple, the latter flushed and talking louder than he should have done in an affected voice. They went to the theatre, and afterward drove up Fifth Avenue to Betty's party. George was dazzled, and every moment conscious of the effort to prevent Goodhue's noticing it. His excitement increased as he came to the famous establishment in the large ballroom of which Betty was waiting, and, perhaps, already, Sylvia. To an extent the approaching culmination of his own campaign put him at ease; lifted him, as it were, above details; left him free to face the moment of his challenge.

The lower halls were brilliant with pretty, eager faces, noisy with chatter and laughter, a trifle heady from an infiltration of perfumes.

Wandel joined them upstairs and took George's card, returning it after a time nearly filled.

"When you see anybody you particularly want to dance with," he advised secretly, "just cut in without formality. The mere fact of your presence ought to be introduction enough. You see everybody here knows, or thinks he knows, everybody else."

George wondered why Wandel went out of his way, and in that particular direction. Did the little man suspect? The succeeding moments brushed the question aside.

Betty was radiant, lovelier in her white-and-yellow fashion than George had ever seen her. He shrank a little from their first contact, all the more startling to

him because he was so little accustomed to the ritual familiarity of dancing. With his arm around her, with her hand in his, with her golden hair brushing his cheek, with her lips and eyes smiling up at him, he felt like one who steals. Why not? Didn't people win their most prized possessions through theft of one kind or another? It was because those pliant fingers were always at his mind that he wanted to release them, wanted to run away from Betty since she always made him desire to tell her the truth.

"I'm glad you could come. It isn't as bad as football, is it? Have we any more? If I show signs of distress do cut in if you're not too busy."

He overcame his fear of collisions, avoiding other couples smoothly and rhythmically. Dalrymple, he observed, was less successful, apologizing in a high, excited voice. As in a haze George watched a procession of elderly women, young girls, and men of every age, with his own tall figure and slightly anxious face greeting him now and then from a mirror. This repeated and often-unexpected recognition encouraged him. He was bigger and better looking than most; in the glasses, at least, he appeared as well-dressed. More than once he heard girls say:

"Who is that big chap with Betty Alston?"

With all his heart he wanted to ask Betty why she had been so kind to him from the beginning, why she was so kind now. He longed to tell her how it had affected him. She glanced up curiously. Without realizing it his grasp had tightened. He relaxed it, wondering what had been in his mind. It was this odd proximity to a beautiful girl who had been kind to him that had for a moment swung him from his

real purpose in coming here, the only purpose he had. He resumed his inspection of the crowding faces. He didn't see Lambert or Sylvia. Had he been wrong? It was incredible they shouldn't appear.

The music stopped.

"Thanks," he said. "Three after this."

His voice was wistful.

"I did like that."

He desired to tell her that he didn't care to dance with any one else, except Sylvia, of course.

"I enjoyed it, too. Will you take me back?"

But her partner met them on the way, and he commenced to trail his.

It was halfway through the next number that he knew he had not planned futilely. It was like Sylvia to arrive in that fashion—a distracting element in a settled picture, or as one beyond the general run for whom a special welcome was a matter of course. To George's ears the orchestra played louder, as if to call attention to her. To his eyes the dancers slackened their pace. The chatter certainly diminished, and nearly everyone glanced toward the door where she stood a little in advance of her mother and two men.

George was able to judge reasonably. In dress and appearance she was the most striking woman in the room. Her dark colouring sprang at one, demanding attention. George saw Dalrymple unevenly force a path in her direction. He caught his breath. The dance resumed its former rhythm. In its intricacies Sylvia was for a time lost.

Sometime later Lambert drifted in. George saw him dancing with Betty. He also found Sylvia. He managed to direct his partner close to her a number of times. She must have seen him, but her eyes did not waver or her colour heighten. He wouldn't ask for an introduction. There was no point. His imagination pictured a number of probable disasters. If he should ask her to dance would she recognize him, and laugh, and demand, so that people could hear, how he had forced a way into this place?

George relinquished his partner to a man who cut in. From a harbour close to the wall he watched Sylvia, willing himself to the point of action.

"I will make her know me before I leave this dance," he said to himself.

Dalrymple had her now. His weak face was too flushed. He was more than ever in people's way. George caught the distress in Sylvia's manner. He remembered Wandel's advice, what Betty had asked him to do for her. He dodged, without further reflection, across the floor, and held out his hand.

"If I may——"

Without looking at him she accepted his hand, and they glided off, while Dalrymple stared angrily. George scarcely noticed. There was room in his mind for no more than this amazing and intoxicating experience. She was so close that he could have bent his head and placed his lips on her dark hair—closer than she had been that unforgettable day. The experience was worthless unless she knew who he was.

"She must know," he thought.

If she did, why did she hide her knowledge behind an unfathomable masquerade?

"That was kind of you," he heard her say. "Poor Dolly!"

She glanced up. Interrogation entered her eyes.

"I can't seem to remember——"

"I came from Princeton with Dick Goodhue," he explained. "It seemed such a simple thing. Shouldn't I have cut in?"

He looked straight at her now. His heart seemed to stop. She had to be made to remember.

"My name is George Morton."

She smiled.

"I've heard Betty talk of you. You're a great football player. It was very kind. Of course it's all right."

But it wasn't. The touch of her hand became unbearable to George because she didn't remember. He had to make her remember.

They were near the entrance. He paused and drew her apart from the circling dancers.

"Would you mind losing a little of this?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady. "It may seem queer, but I have something to tell you that you ought to know."

She studied him, surprised and curious.

"I can't imagine——" she began. "What is it?"

It was only a step through the door and to an alcove

with a red plush bench. The light was soft there. No one was close enough to hear. She sat down, laughing.

"Don't keep me in suspense."

He, too, sat down. He spoke deliberately.

"The last two times I've seen you you wouldn't remember me. Even now, when I've told you my name, you won't."

Her surprise increased.

"It's about you! But I said Betty had——Who are you?"

He bent closer.

"If I didn't tell you you might remember later. Anyway, I wouldn't want to fight a person whose eyes were closed."

Her lips half parted. She appeared a trifle frightened. She made a movement as if to rise.

"Just a minute," he said, harshly.

He called on the hatred that had increased during the hours of his mental and physical slavery, a hatred to be appeased only through his complete mastery of her.

"It won't take much to remind you," he hurried on. "Although you talk to me as if I were a man now, last summer I was a beast because I had the nerve to touch you when you were thrown from your horse."

She stood up quickly, reaching out for the alcove curtain. Her contralto voice was uneven.

"Stop! You shouldn't have said that. You shouldn't have told me."

All at once she straightened, her cheeks flaming. She started for the ballroom. He sprang after her, whispering over her shoulder:

"Now we can start fair."

She turned and faced him.

"I don't know how you got here, but you ask for a fight, Mr. Morton——"

He smiled.

"I am Mr. Morton now. I'm getting on."

Then he knew again that sickening sensation of treacherous ground eager to swallow him.

"Are you going to run and tell them," he asked, softly, "as you did your father last summer?"

She crossed the threshold of the ballroom. He watched her while she hesitated for a moment, seeking feverishly someone in the brilliant, complacent crowd.

XVI

George watched Sylvia, fighting his instinct to call out a command that she should keep secret forever what he had told her. It was intolerable to stand helpless, to realize that on her sudden decision his future depended. Did she seek her mother, or Lambert, who would understand everything at the first word? Nevertheless, he preferred she should go to Lambert, because he could forecast too easily the

alternative—Mrs. Planter's emotionless summoning of Betty and her mother; perhaps of Goodhue or Wandel or Dalrymple; the brutal advertisement of just what he was to all the people he knew, to all the people he wanted to know. That might mean the close of Betty's friendliness, the destruction of the fine confidence that had developed between him and Goodhue, a violent reorganization of all his plans. He gathered strength from a warm realization that with Squibs and Mrs. Squibs Sylvia couldn't possibly hurt him.

He became ashamed of his misgivings, aware that for nothing in the world, even if he had the power, would he rearrange the last five minutes.

He saw her brilliant figure start forward and take an uneven course around the edge of the room until a man caught her and swung her out among the dancers. George turned away. He was sorry it was Wandel who had interfered, but that would give her time to reflect; and even if she blurted it out to Wandel, the little man might be decent enough to advise her to keep quiet.

George wandered restlessly across the hall to the smoking-room. How long would the music lilt on, imprisoning Sylvia in the grasp of Wandel or another man?

He asked for a glass of water, and took it to a lounge in front of the fire. Here he sat, listening to the rollicking music, to the softer harmonies of feminine voices that seemed to define for him compelling and pleasurable vistas down which he might no longer glance. When the silence came Sylvia would go to her mother or Lambert.

"My very dear—George."

Lambert himself bent over the back of the lounge. George guessed the other had seen him enter and had followed. All the better, even if he had come to attack. George had things to say to Lambert, too; so he glanced about the room and was grateful that, except for the servants, it held only some elderly men he had never seen before, who sat at a distance, gossiping and laughing.

"Where," Lambert asked, "will I run into you next?"

"Anywhere," George said. "Whenever we're both invited to the same place. I didn't come without being asked, so my being here isn't funny."

Lambert walked around and sat down. All the irony had left his face. He had an air of doubtful disapproval.

"Maybe not funny," he said, "but—odd."

George stirred. How long would the music and the laughter continue to drift in?

"Why?"

"You've travelled a long way," Lambert mused. "I wonder if in football clothes men don't look too much of a pattern. I wonder if you haven't let yourself be carried a little too far."

"Why?" George asked again.

"Princeton and football," Lambert went on, "are well enough in their way; but when you come to a place like this and dance with those girls who don't know, it seems scarcely fair. Of course, if they knew, and wanted you still—that's the whole point."

"They wouldn't," George admitted, "but why should they matter if the people that count know?"

Lambert glanced at him. Was the music's quicker measure prophetic of the end?

"What do you mean?" Lambert asked.

"What you said last fall has worried me," George answered. "That's the reason I came here—so that your sister would know me from Adam. She does, and she can do what she pleases about it. It's in her hands now."

Lambert reddened.

"You've the nerve of the devil," he said, angrily. "You had no business to speak to my sister. The whole thing had been forgotten."

George shook his head.

"You hadn't forgotten it. She told me that day that I shouldn't forget. I hadn't forgotten it. I never will."

"I can't talk about it," Lambert said.

He looked squarely at George.

"Here's what puts your being here out of shape: You're ashamed of what you were. Aren't you?"

"I've always thought," George said, "you were man enough to realize it's only what I am and may become that counts. I wouldn't say ashamed. I'm sorry, because it makes what I'm doing just that much harder; because you, for instance, know about it, and might cause trouble."

Lambert made no difficulty about the implied question.

"I don't want to risk causing trouble for any one unjustly. It's up to you not to make me. But don't bother my sister again."

"Let me get far enough," George said, "and you won't be able to make trouble—you, or your sister, or your father."

Lambert grinned, the doubt leaving his face as if he had reached a decision.

"I wouldn't bank on father. I'd keep out of his sight."

The advice placed him, for the present, on the safe side. Sylvia's decision remained, and just then the music crashed into a silence, broken by exigent applause. George got up, thrusting his hands in his pockets. The orchestra surrendered to the applause, but was Sylvia dancing now?

Voices drifted in from the hall, one high and obdurate; others better controlled, but persistent in argument. Lambert grimaced. George sneered.

"But that's all right, because he didn't have to work for his living."

"If you don't come a cropper," Lambert said, "you'll get fed up with that sort of thinking. Dolly's young."

Dalrymple was the first in the room, flushed, a trifle uneven in his movements. Goodhue and Wandel followed. Goodhue smiled in a pained, surprised way. Wandel's precise features expressed nothing.

"Why not dancing, Lambert, old Eli?" Dalrymple called jovially. "Haul these gospel sharks off—— Waiter! I say, waiter! Something bubbly, dry, and nineteen hundred, if they're doing us that well."

The others didn't protest. They seemed to arrange themselves as a friendly screen between Dalrymple and the elderly men. George didn't care to talk to Dalrymple in that condition—there was too much that Dalrymple had always wanted to say and hadn't. He started for the door, but Wandel caught his arm.

"Wait around, very strong person," he whispered. "Dolly doesn't know it, but he's leaving in a minute."

George shook his head, and started on. Dalrymple glanced up.

"Morton!" he said.

Goodhue took the glass from the waiter, but Dalrymple, grinning a shamed sort of triumph and comprehension, reached out for it and sipped.

"Not bad. Great dancer, Morton. Around the end, and through the centre, and all that——"

"Keep quiet," Goodhue warned him.

George knew that the other wouldn't. He shrank from the breaking of the sullen truce between them. Dalrymple glanced at his cuffs, spilling a little of the wine.

"Damned sight more useful to stick to your laundry—it's none too good."

Quite distinctly George caught Lambert's startled change of countenance and his quick movement forward, Goodhue's angry flush, Wandel's apparent unconcern. In that moment he measured his advance, understood all he had got from Squibs and books, from Betty, from Goodhue, from Princeton; but, although he easily conquered his first impulse to strike, his rage glowed the hotter because it was

confined. As he passed close he heard Lambert whisper:

"Good man!"

But even then Wandel wouldn't let him go, and the music had stopped again, and only the undefinable shadows of women's voices reached him. He tried to shake off Wandel who had followed him to the hall. He couldn't wait. He had to enter that moving, chattering crowd to find out what Sylvia had decided.

"Go downstairs, great man," Wandel was whispering, "get a cab, and wait in it at the door, so that you will be handy when I bring the infant Bacchus out."

"I'd rather not," George said, impatiently. "Someone else will do."

"By no means. Expediency, my dear friend, and the general welfare. Hercules for little Bacchus."

He couldn't refuse. Wandel and Goodhue, and, for that matter all of Dalrymple's friends, those girls in there, depended on him; yet he knew it was a bad business for him and for Dalrymple; and he wanted above all other things to pass for a moment through that brilliant screen that moved perpetually between him and Sylvia.

He waited in the shadows of the cab until Dalrymple and Wandel left the building. Wandel motioned the other into the cab. Dalrymple obeyed, willingly enough, swinging his stick, and humming off the key. Probably Wandel's diplomacy. Wandel jumped in, called an address to the driver, and slammed the door.

"Where are you taking him?" George asked.

For the first time Dalrymple seemed to realize who the silent man in the shadows was.

"I'm not going on any party with Morton," he said, sullenly.

"You can go to the devil," Wandel said, pleasantly, "as long as you keep away from decent people until you're decent yourself."

"No," George said. "He's going home or I have nothing more to do with it."

"Perhaps you're right," Wandel agreed, "but you can fancy I had to offer him something better than that to get him out."

He tapped on the pane and gave the driver the new address. Dalrymple started to rise.

"Won't go home—you keep your dirty hands off me, Morton. You——"

"Hercules!" softly from Wandel.

George grasped Dalrymple's arms, pulled him down, held him as in a vise. Dalrymple raved. Wandel laughed pleasantly.

"Dirty hands," flashed through George's brain. Did Dalrymple know anything, or was it an instinctive suspicion, or merely the explosion of helpless temper and dislike?

The ride was brief, and the block in which Dalrymple lived was, fortunately, at that moment free of pedestrians. Wandel descended and rang the bell. When the door was opened George relaxed his grasp.

Dalrymple tried to spring from the opposite side of the cab. George caught him, lifted him, carried him like a child across the sidewalk, and set him down in the twilight of a hall where a flunky gaped.

"There's your precious friend," he accused Wandel.

He returned to the cab, rubbing his hands as if they needed cleansing.

"There's no one like you, great man," Wandel said when he had come back to the cab. "You've done Dolly and everyone he would have seen to-night a good turn."

But George felt he had done himself a bad one. During the rest of his time at Princeton, and afterward in New York, he would have a dangerous enemy. Dirty hands! Trust Dalrymple to do his best to give that qualification its real meaning. And these people! You could trust them, too, to stand by Dalrymple against the man who had done them a good turn. It had been rotten of Wandel to ask it, to take him away at that vital moment. Anyway, it was done. He forgot Dalrymple in his present anxiety. The ride seemed endless. The ascent in the elevator was a unique torture. The cloak-room attendants had an air of utter indifference. When he could, George plunged into the ballroom, escaping Wandel, threading the hurrying maze to the other end of the room where earlier in the evening he had seen Sylvia's mother sitting with Mrs. Alston. George passed close, every muscle taut. Mrs. Planter gave no sign. Mrs. Alston reached over and tapped his arm with her fan. He paused, holding his breath.

"Betty asked me to look for you," she said. "Where have you been? She was afraid you had found her

party tiresome. You haven't been dancing much."

He answered her politely, and walked on. He braced himself against the wall, the strain completely broken. She hadn't told. She hadn't demanded that her mother take her home. She hadn't said: "Betty, what kind of men do you ask to your dances?" Why hadn't she? Again he saw his big, well-clothed figure in a glass, and he smiled. Was it because he was already transformed?

Here she came, dancing with Goodhue, and Goodhue seemed trying to lead her close. George didn't understand at first that he silently asked for news of Dalrymple. His own eyes studied Sylvia. Her face held too much colour. She gave him back his challenge, but the contempt in her eyes broadened his smile. He managed a reassuring nod to Goodhue, but Dalrymple, for the time, was of no importance. Sylvia was going to fight, and not like a spoiled child. He must have impressed her as being worthy of a real fight.

He faced the rest of the evening with new confidence. He forgot to be over-careful with these people whose actions were unstudied. He dodged across the floor and took Betty from Lambert Planter while Lambert raised his eyebrows, relinquished her with pronounced reluctance, and watched George guide her swiftly away. Maybe Lambert was right, and he ought to tell Betty, but not now. To-night, against all his expectations, he found himself having a good time, enjoying more than anything else this intimate and exhilarating progress with Betty. Always he hated to give her up, but he danced with other girls, and found they liked to dance with him because he was big, and danced well, and was Dicky

Goodhue's friend and Betty's, and played football; but, since he couldn't very well ask Sylvia, he only really cared to dance with Betty.

He was at Betty's table for supper. He didn't like to hear these pretty girls laughing about Dalrymple, but then with them Dalrymple must have exercised a good deal of restraint. It ought to be possible to make them see the ugly side, to bare the man's instinct to go from this party to another. Then they wouldn't laugh.

Lambert sat down for awhile.

"Where's Sylvia?" Betty asked.

Lambert shrugged his shoulders.

"It's hard enough to keep track of you, Betty. Sylvia's a sister."

George gathered that Sylvia's absence from that table had impressed them both. He knew very well where she was, across the room, focus for as large a gathering as Betty's, chiefly of young men, eager for her brilliancy. Lambert went on, glancing at George his questions of the smoking-room.

It wasn't long before the dawn when George said polite things with Goodhue and Wandel, and after their pattern. In the lower hall he noticed that all these pleasure seekers, a while ago flushed and happy, had undergone a devastating change. Faces were white. Gowns looked rumpled and old. The laughter and chatter were no longer impulsive.

"The way one feels after a hard game," he thought.

Goodhue offered to take Wandel in and drop him. The little man alone seemed as fresh and neat as at

the start of the evening.

"Had a good time, great person?" he asked as they drove off. "But then why shouldn't great men always have good times?"

Wandel's manner suggested that he had seen to George's good time. What he had actually done was to involve him in an open hostility with Dalrymple. The others didn't mention that youth. Was there a tactful thought for him in their restraint?

They left Wandel at an expensive bachelor apartment house overlooking the park. George gathered from Goodhue, as they drove on, that Wandel's attitude toward his family was that of an old and confidential friend.

"You see Driggs always has to be his own master," he said.

XVII

Because of the restless contrast of that trip George brought back to Princeton a new appreciation; yet beneath the outer beauty there, he knew, a man's desires and ambitions lost none of their ugliness. He stared at Sylvia's portrait, but it made him want the living body that he had touched, that was going to give him a decent fight. Already he planned for other opportunities to meet her, although with her attitude what it was he didn't see how he could use them to advance his cause; and always there was the possibility of her resenting his persistence to the point of changing her mind about telling.

He had decided to avoid Dalrymple as far as possible, but that first night, as he drowsed over a book, he

heard a knock at his door, not loud, and suggestive of reluctance and indecision. He hid the photograph and the riding crop, and called:

"Come in!"

The door opened slowly. Dalrymple stood on the threshold, his weak face white and perverse. George waited, watching him conquer a bitter disinclination. He knew what was coming and how much worse it would make matters between them.

"It seems," the tortured man said, "that I was beastly rude to you last night. I've come to say I didn't mean it and am sorry."

"You've come," George said, quietly, "because Goodhue and Wandel have made you, through threats, I daresay. If you hadn't meant it you wouldn't have been rude in just that way. I'm grateful to Goodhue and Wandel, but I won't have your apologies, because they don't mean a damn thing."

Dalrymple's face became evil. He started to back out.

"Wait a minute," George commanded. "You don't like me because I'm working my way through college. That's what you shot at me last night when you'd drunk enough to give you the nerve, but it's been in your mind all along. I'd pound a little common-sense and decency into you, only I wouldn't feel clean after doing it."

That, to an extent, broke down his severity. It sounded queer, from him. If Lambert Planter could have heard him say that!

"Let the others think they've done us a good turn," he

went on. "We have to live in the same class without clawing each other's faces every time we meet, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes, and I won't try to pull it over yours. Now get out, and don't come here alone again."

He felt better and cleaner after that. When Dalrymple had gone he finished his chapter and tumbled into bed.

XVIII

George was glad of the laundry, indeed, as the holidays approached. It gave him a sound excuse for not dashing joyously from Princeton with the rest, but it didn't cure the depression with which he saw the college empty. He wandered about a campus as deserted as a city swept by pestilence, asking himself what he would have done if his father and mother hadn't exiled him as thoroughly as Old Planter had. There was no point thinking about that; it wasn't even a question. He took long walks or stayed in his room, reading, and once or twice answering regretfully invitations that had sprung from encounters at Betty's party. It was nice to have them, but of course he couldn't go to such affairs alone just yet. Besides, he didn't have the money.

Squibs Bailly limped all the way up his stairs one day, scolding him for sulking in his tent.

"I only heard last night that you were in town. I'm not psychic. Why haven't you been around?"

"I didn't want to bother——"

Bailly interrupted him.

"I'm afraid I didn't appreciate you went quite so much alone."

"Altogether alone," George said. "But I don't want anybody to feel sorry for me because of that. It has some advantages."

"You're too young to say such things," Bailly said.

He made George go to the Dickinson Street house for Christmas dinner. There was no other guest. The rooms were bright with holly, and a very small but dazzling Christmas tree stood in a corner, bearing a gift for him. Mrs. Bailly, as he entered, touched his cheek with her lips and welcomed him by his first name. She created for him an illusion that made him choke a trifle. She made him feel as if he had come home.

"And," he thought, "Squibs and she know."

He wondered if it was that knowledge that made Squibs go into his social views one evening when he sat with him in the study. It was then that George realized he had no such views apart from his own case. Vaguely he knew that somewhere outside of Princeton strikes multiplied these days, that poor people complained of the cost of food and housing, that communistic propaganda was talked with an increasing freedom, that now and then a bomb burst, destroying more often than not the people it was designed to help. He saw that Squibs sought to interest him, and he gave a close attention while the tutor elaborated his slight knowledge of the growing unrest.

"But it's all so far away, sir," he said. "I've so much of more importance to me to bother about right here."

Bailly relighted his pipe.

"The happy, limited vision of youth!" he sighed. "You'll be through your a, b, c's before you know it. Are you going to face such big issues without any forethought?"

He smoked for a few moments, then commenced to speak doubtfully.

"And in another sense it isn't as far away as you think. It all goes on *in petto*, right here in undergraduate Princeton. The views a man takes away from college should be applicable to the conditions he meets outside."

"I don't quite see what you mean, sir."

Why was Bailly going at it so carefully?

"I mean," Bailly said, "that here you have your poor men, your earnest men, and your lords of the land. I mean there is no real community of interest here. I mean you've made friends because you're bigger and better looking than most, and play football like a demon. You haven't made any friends simply because you are poor and earnest. And the poor students suffer from the cost of things, and the rich men don't know and don't care. And the poor men, and the men without family or a good school behind them, who haven't football or some outstanding usefulness, are as submerged as the workers in a mine. Prospect Street is Fifth Avenue or Park Lane, and the men who can't get in the clubs, because of poverty or lack of prominence, remind me of the ragged ones who cling to the railings, peering through at plenty with evil in their hearts."

"You're advocating communism, sir?"

Bailly shook his head.

"I'm advocating nothing. I'm trying to find out what you advocate."

"I can't help feeling," George said, stubbornly, "that a man has to look after himself."

And as he walked home he confessed freely enough in his own mind:

"I'm advocating George Morton. How can Squibs expect me to bother with any one else when I have so far to go?"

XIX

He thrust Squibs' uncomfortable prods from his brain. He applied himself to his books—useful books. Education and culture were more important to him than the physical reactions of overworked labour or the mental processes of men who advocated violence. Such distracting questions, however, were uncomfortably in the air. Allen, one of the poor men against whom the careful Rogers had warned him long ago, called on him one cold night. The manner of his address made George wonder if Squibs had been talking to him, too.

"Would like a few minutes' chat, Morton. No one worth while's in Princeton. It won't queer you to have me in your room."

No, George decided. That was an opening one might expect from Allen. The man projected an appreciable power from his big, bony figure; his angular face. George had heard vaguely that he had worked in a factory, preparing himself for college. He knew from

his own observation that Allen wasn't above waiting at commons, and he had seen the lesser men turn to him as a leader.

"Sit down," George said, "and don't talk like an ass. You can't queer me. What do you want me to do—offer to walk to classes with my arm over your shoulder? There's too much of that sensitive talk going around."

"You're a plain speaker," Allen said. "So am I. You'll admit you've seen a lot more of the pretty crowd than you have of me and my friends. I thought it might be useful to ask you why."

"Because," George answered, "I'm in college to get everything I can. You and your crowd don't happen to have the stuff I want."

Allen fingered a book nervously.

"I came," he said, "to see if I couldn't persuade you that we have."

"I'm listening," George said, indifferently.

"Right on the table!" Allen answered, quickly. "You're the biggest poor man in the class. You're logically the poor men's Moses. They admire you. You've always been talked of in terms of the varsity. Everybody knows you're Princeton's best football player. The poor men would do anything for you. What will you do for them?"

"I won't have you split the class that way," George cried.

"Every class," Allen said, "is split along that line, only this class is going to let the split be seen. You work your way through college, but you run with a rich

crowd, led by the hand of Driggs Wandel."

So even Allen had noticed that and had become curious.

"Wandel," Allen went on, "will use you to hurt us—the poor men; and when he's had what he wants of you he'll send you back to the muck heap."

George shook his head, smiling.

"No, because you've said yourself that whatever power I have comes from football and not from an empty pocket-book."

"Use all the power you have," Allen urged. "Come in with us. Help the poor men, and we'll know how to reward you."

"You're already thinking of Sophomore elections?" George asked. "I don't care particularly for office."

Allen's face reddened with anger.

"I'm thinking of the clubs first. What I said when I came in is true. The selfish men intriguing for Prospect Street don't dare be friendly with the poor men; afraid it might hurt their chances to be seen with a poler. By God, that's vicious! It denies us the companionship we've come to college to find. We want all the help we can get here. The clubs are a hideous hindrance. Promise me you'll keep away from the clubs."

George laughed.

"I haven't made up my mind about the clubs," he said. "They have bad features, but there's good in them. The club Goodhue joins will be the best club of our time in college. Suppose you knew you could get

an election to that; would you turn it down?"

The angular face became momentarily distorted.

"I won't consider an impossible situation. Anyway, I couldn't afford it. That's another bad feature. If you want, I'll say no, a thousand times no."

"I wouldn't trust you," George laughed, "but you know you haven't a chance. So you want to smash the thing you can't get in. I call *that* vicious. And let me tell you, Allen. You may reform things out of existence, but you can't destroy them with a bomb. Squibs Bailly will tell you that."

"You think you'll make a good club," Allen said.

"I'll tell you what I think," George answered, quite unruffled, "when I make up my mind to stand for or against the clubs. Squibs says half the evils in the world come from precipitancy. You're precipitate. Thrash it out carefully, as I'm doing."

He wondered if he had convinced Allen, knowing very well that his own attitude would be determined by the outcome of the chance he had to enter Goodhue's club.

"We've got to make up our minds now," Allen said. "Promise me that you'll keep out of the clubs and I'll make you the leader of the class. You're in a position to bring the poor men to the top for once."

George didn't want to break with Allen. The man did control a large section of the class, so he sent him away amicably enough, merely repeating that he hadn't made up his mind; and ending with:

"But I won't be controlled by any faction."

Allen left, threatening to talk with him again.

George didn't sleep well that night. Squibs and Allen had made him uncomfortable. Finally he cleared his mind with the reflection that his private attitude was determined. No matter whom it hurt he was going to be one of the fortunates with a whip in his hand; but he, above most people, could understand the impulses of men like Allen, and the restless ones in the world, who didn't hold a whip, and so desired feverishly to spring.

XX

The cold weather placed a smooth black floor on Lake Carnegie. George went down one evening with the Baillys. They brought Betty Alston, who was just home from New York and had dined with them. A round moon smiled above the row of solemn and vigilant poplars along the canal bank. The shadows of the trees made you catch your breath as if on the edge of perilous pitfalls.

Going down through the woods they passed Allen. Even in that yellow-splashed darkness George recognized the bony figure.

"Been skating?" he called.

"Hello, Morton! No, I don't skate."

"Then," George laughed, "why don't you smash the ice?"

Allen laughed back mirthlessly, but didn't answer; and, as they went on, Betty wanted to know what it was all about. George told her of Allen's visit.

"But congenial people," she said, "will always gather

together. It would be dreadful to have one's friends arbitrarily chosen. You'll go to a club with your friends."

"But Allen says the poor men can't afford it," he answered. "I'm one of the poor men."

"You'll always find a way to do what you want," she said, confidently.

But when they were on the lake the question of affording the things one wanted slipped between them again.

George had a fancy that Mrs. Bailly guided her awkward husband away from Betty and him. Why? At least it was pleasant to be alone with Betty, gliding along near the bank, sometimes clasping hands at a half-seen, doubtful stretch. Betty spoke of it.

"Where are my guardians?"

"Let's go a little farther," he urged. "We'll find them easily enough."

It didn't worry her much.

"Why did you come back so soon?" she asked.

He hesitated. He had hoped to avoid such questions.

"I haven't been away."

She glanced up, surprised.

"You mean you've been in Princeton through the holiday?"

"Yes, I feel I ought to go easy with what little I have."

"I knew you were working your way through," she said, "but I never guessed it meant as much denial as that."

"Don't worry," he laughed, "I'll make money next summer."

"I wish I'd known. And none of your friends thought!"

"Why should they? They're mostly too rich."

"That's wrong."

"Are you driving me into Allen's camp?" he asked. "You can't; for I expect to be rich myself, some day. Any man can, if he goes about it in the right way. Maybe Allen doubts his power, and that's the reason he's against money and the pleasant things it buys. Does it make any difference to you, my being poor for a time?"

"Why should it?" she asked, warmly.

"Allen," he said, "couldn't understand your skating with me."

Why not tell Betty the rest in this frozen and romantic solitude they shared? He decided not. He had risked enough for the present. When she turned around he didn't try to hold her, skating swiftly back at her side, aware of a danger in such solitude; charging himself with a scarcely definable disloyalty to his conception of Sylvia.

XXI

He fancied Betty desired to make up for her thoughtlessness during the holidays when she asked him for dinner on a Saturday night. With that dinner,

no matter what others might think of his lack of money and background, she had put herself on record, for it was a large, formal party sprinkled with people from New York, and drawing from the University only the kind of men Allen was out to fight. Wandel, George thought, rather disapproved of his being there, but as a result, he made two trips to parties in New York during the winter. Both were failures, for he didn't meet Sylvia, yet he heard of her always as a dazzling success.

He answered Dalrymple's cold politeness with an irritating indifference. In the spring, however, he detected a radical alteration in Dalrymple's manner.

By that time, the scheme discussed carelessly at the Alstons' in the fall had been worked out. On good afternoons, when their work allowed, a few men, all friends of the Alstons, drove out, and, with passable ponies, played practice matches at polo on the field Mr. Alston had had arranged. The neighbours fell into a habit of concentrating there, and George was thrown into intimate contact with them, seeing other gates open rather eagerly before him, for he hadn't miscalculated his ability to impress with horses. When Mr. Alston had first asked him he had accepted gladly. Because of his long habit in the saddle and his accuracy of eye he played better from the start than these other novices. As in football, he teamed well with Goodhue.

"Goodhue to Morton," Wandel complained, "or Morton to Goodhue. What chance has a mere duffer like me against such a very distinguished combination?"

It was during these games that Goodhue fell into the practice of shouting George's first name across the

field, and when George became convinced that such familiarity was not chance, but an expression of a deepening friendship, he responded unaffectedly. It was inevitable the others should adopt Goodhue's example. Even Dalrymple did, and George asked himself why the man was trying to appear friendly, for he knew that in his heart Dalrymple had not altered.

It filled George with a warm and formless pleasure to hear Betty using his Christian name, to realize that a precedent had this time been established; yet it required an effort, filled him with a great confusion, to call her familiarly "Betty" for the first time.

He chatted with her at the edge of the field while grooms led the ponies up and down.

"What are your plans for the summer?" she asked.

"I don't quite know what will happen."

"We," she said, "will be in Maine. Can't you run up in August? Dicky Goodhue's coming then."

He looked at her. He tried to hide his hunger for the companionship, the relaxation such a visit would give. He glanced away.

"I wish I could. Have you forgotten I'm to make money? I've got to try to do that this summer, Betty."

There, it was out. Colour stole into her white cheeks.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He had another reason for refusing. He was growing afraid of Betty. He was conscious of an increasing effort to drive her memory from the little room where Sylvia's portrait watched. It was, he told

himself, because he didn't see Sylvia oftener, couldn't feel his heart respond to the exciting enmity in her brilliant eyes.

Goodhue and Dalrymple, it developed, were parting, amicably enough as far as any one knew.

"Dolly thinks he'll room alone next year," was Goodhue's explanation. Dalrymple explained nothing.

Driving back to town one afternoon Goodhue proposed to George that he replace Dalrymple.

"Campus rooms," he said, "aren't as expensive as most in town."

He mentioned a figure. George thought rapidly. What an opportunity! And aside from what Goodhue could do for him, he was genuinely fond of the man. George craved absolute independence, and he knew Goodhue would give him all of that he asked for.

"I'd like to," he said.

Goodhue smiled.

"That's splendid. I think we'll manage together."

Wandel frowned at the news. So did Allen. Allen came frequently now to talk his college socialism. George listened patiently, always answering:

"I've made up my mind to nothing, except that I'll take my friends where I find them, high or low. But I'm not against you, Allen."

Yet George was uneasy, knowing the moment for making up his mind wouldn't be long delayed. He understood very well that already some men knew to

what club they'd go more than a year later. Secretly, perhaps illegally, the sections for the clubs were forming in his class. Small groups were quietly organizing under the guidance of the upper classes. During Sophomore year these small groups would elect other men to the limit of full membership. It was perfectly clear that unless he went in ahead of Dalrymple his chances of making the club he wanted were worthless. As a result of his talks with Allen, moreover, he felt that Wandel didn't want him. If Wandel could persuade Goodhue that George could serve the interests of the fortunates best from the outside the issue would be settled.

"But I won't be used that way," George decided. "I'm out for myself."

Along that straight line he had made his plans for the summer. Somehow he was going to study the methods of the greatest financial market in the country, so that later he could apply them serviceably to his own fortune. Bailly had other ideas. One night while they lounged on the front campus listening to senior singing the long tutor suggested that he take up some form of manual labour.

"It would keep you in good condition," he said, "and it might broaden your vision by disclosing the aims and the dissatisfactions of those who live by the sweat of their brows."

George frowned.

"I know enough of that already. I've been a labourer myself. I haven't the time, sir."

Bailly probably knew that he was dealing with a

point of view far more determined and mature than that of the average undergraduate. He didn't argue, but George felt the need of an apology.

"I've got to learn how to make money," he said.

"Money isn't everything," Bailly sighed.

"I've started after certain things," George justified himself. "Money's one of them. I'll work for next to nothing this summer if I have to. I'll be a runner, the man who sweeps out the office, anything that will give me a chance to watch and study Wall Street. I'm sorry if you don't approve, sir."

"I didn't say that," Bailly answered, "but the fact was sufficiently clear."

Yet George knew perfectly well a few days later that it was Bailly who had spoken about his ambition to Mr. Alston.

"Blodgett, I fancy," Mr. Alston said, "will offer you some small start."

He handed George a letter addressed to one Josiah Blodgett, of the firm of Blodgett and Sinclair.

"Good luck, and good-bye until next fall."

"If you do change your mind——If you can manage it ——" Betty said.

So George, two or three days before commencement, left Princeton for Wall Street, and presented his letter.

The offices of Blodgett and Sinclair were gorgeous and extensive, raw with marble, and shining with mahogany. They suggested a hotel in bad taste rather

than a factory that turned out money in spectacular quantities.

"Mr. Blodgett will see you," a young man announced in an awed voice, as if such condescension were infrequent.

In the remote room where Blodgett lurked the scheme of furnishing appeared to culminate. The man himself shared its ornamental grossness. He glanced up, his bald head puckering half its height. George saw that although he was scarcely middle-aged Blodgett was altogether too fat, with puffy, unhealthily coloured cheeks. In such a face the tiny eyes had an appearance nearly porcine. The man's clothing would have put an habitué of the betting ring at ease—gray-and-white checks, dove-coloured spats, a scarlet necktie. Pudgy fingers twisted Mr. Alston's letter. The little eyes opened wider. The frown relaxed. A bass voice issued from the broad mouth:

"If you've come here to learn, you can't expect a million dollars a week. Say fifteen to start."

George didn't realize how extraordinarily generous that was. He only decided he could scrape along on it.

"Mr. Alston," the deep voice went on, "tells me you're a great football player. That's a handicap. All you can tackle here is trouble, and the only kicking we have is when Mundy boots somebody out of a job. He's my office manager. Report to him. Wait a minute. I'd give a ping-pong player a job if Mr. Alston asked me to. He's a fine man. But then I'm through. It's up to the man and Mundy. If the man's no good Mundy doesn't even bother to tell me, and it's twenty stories

to the street."

George started to thank him, but already the rotund figure was pressed against the desk, and the tiny eyes absorbed in important-looking papers.

Mundy, George decided, wasn't such an ogre after all. He wore glasses. He was bald, thin, and stoop-shouldered. He had the benign expression of a parson; but behind that bald forehead, George soon learned, was stored all the knowledge he craved, without, however, the imagination to make it personally very valuable.

If he didn't sweep the office at first, George approximated such labour, straightening the desks of the mighty, checking up on the contents of waste-paper baskets, seeing that the proper people got mail and newspapers, running errands; and always, in the office or outside, he kept his ears open and his eyes wide. He absorbed the patter of the Street. He learned to separate men into classes, the wise ones, who always made money, and the foolish, who now and then had good luck, but most of the time were settling their losses. And at every opportunity he was after what Mundy concealed behind his appearance of a parson.

At night he dissected the financial journals, watching the alterations in the market, and probing for the causes; applying to this novitiate the same grim determination he had brought to Squibs Bailly's lessons a year before. Never once was he tempted to seek a simple path to fortune.

"When I speculate," he told himself, "there'll be mighty little risk about it."

Even in those days his fifteen dollars a week condemned him to a cheap lodging house near Lexington Avenue, the simplest of meals, and practically no relaxation. He exercised each morning, and walked each evening home from the office, for he hadn't forgotten what Princeton expected from him in the fall.

Sylvia's photograph and the broken riding crop supervised his labours, but he knew he couldn't hope, except by chance, to see her this summer.

One Saturday morning Goodhue came unexpectedly into the office and carried him off to Long Island. George saw the tiny eyes of Blodgett narrow.

Blodgett, perhaps because of Mr. Alston's letter, had condescended to chat with George a number of times in the outer office. On the Monday following he strolled up and jerked out:

"Wasn't that young Richard Goodhue I saw you going off with Saturday?"

"Yes sir."

"Know him well?"

"Very. We're in the same class. We're rooming together next year."

Blodgett grunted and walked on, mopping his puffy face with a shiny blue handkerchief. George wondered if he had displeased Blodgett by going with Goodhue. He decided he hadn't, for the picturesquely dressed man stopped oftener after that, chatting quite familiarly.

Whatever one thought of Blodgett's appearance and manner, one admired him. George hadn't been in the

Street a week before he realized that the house of Blodgett and Sinclair was one of the most powerful in America, with numerous ramifications to foreign countries. There was no phase of finance it didn't touch; and, as far as George could see, it was all Josiah Blodgett, who had come to New York from the West, by way of Chicago. In those offices Sinclair was scarcely more than a name in gold on various doors. Once or twice, during the summer, indeed, George saw the partner chatting in a bored way with Blodgett. His voice was high and affected, like Wandel's, and he had a house in Newport. According to office gossip he had little money interest in the firm, lending the prestige of his name for what Blodgett thought it was worth. As he watched the fat, hard worker chatting with the butterfly man, George suddenly realized that Blodgett might want a house in Newport, too. Was it because he was Richard Goodhue's room-mate that Blodgett stopped him in the hall one day, grinning with good nature?

"If I were a cub," he puffed, "I'd buy this very morning all the Katydid I could, and sell at eighty-nine."

George whistled.

"I knew something was due to happen to Katydid, but I didn't expect anything like that."

"How did you know?" Blodgett demanded.

He shot questions until he had got the story of George's close observation and night drudgery.

"Glad to see Mundy hasn't dropped you out the window yet," he grinned. "Maybe you'll get along. Glad for Mr. Alston's sake. See here, if I were a cub,

and knew as much about Katydid as you do, I wouldn't hesitate to borrow a few cents from the boss."

"No," George said. "I've a very little of my own. I'll use that."

He had, perhaps, two hundred dollars in the bank at Princeton. He drew a check without hesitation and followed Blodgett's advice. He had commenced to speculate without risk. Several times after that Blodgett jerked out similar advice, usually commencing with: "What does young Pierpont Morgan think of so and so?" And usually George would give his employer a reasonable forecast. Because of these discreet hints his balance grew, and Mundy one day announced that his salary had been raised ten dollars.

All that, however, was the brighter side. Often during those hot, heavy nights, while he pieced together the day's complicated pattern, George envied the fortunates who could play away from pavements and baking walls. He found himself counting the days until he would go back to Princeton and football, and Betty's charm; but even that prospect was shadowed by his doubt as to how he would emerge from the club tangle.

He didn't meet Sylvia, but one day he saw Old Planter step from an automobile and enter the marble temple where he was accustomed to sacrifice corporations and people to the gods of his pocket-book. The great man used a heavy stick and climbed the steps rather slowly, flanked by obsequious underlings, gaped at by a crowd, buzzing and over-impressed. Somehow George couldn't fancy Blodgett with the gout—it was too delightfully bred.

He peered in the automobile, but of course Sylvia wasn't there, nor, he gathered from his mother's occasional notes to thank him for the little money he could send her, was she much at Oakmont.

"I'll see her this fall," he told himself, "and next winter. I've started to do what I said I would."

As far as Wall Street was concerned, Blodgett evidently agreed with him.

"I can put up with you next summer," he said at parting. "I'll write Mr. Alston you're fit for something besides football."

Mundy displayed a pastoral sadness.

"You ought to stay right here," he said. "College is all right if you don't want to amount to a hill of beans. It's rotten for making money."

Nevertheless, he agreed to send George a weekly letter, giving his wise views as to what was going on among the money makers. They all made him feel that even in that rushing place his exit had caused a perceptible ripple.

XXII

The smallness, the untidiness, the pure joy of Squibs Bailly's study!

The tutor ran his hands over George's muscles.

"You're looking older and a good deal worn," he said, "but thank God you're still hard."

Mrs. Bailly sat there, too. They were both anxious for his experiences, yet when he had told them

everything he sensed a reservation in their praise.

"I think I should turn my share of the laundry back," he said, defiantly. "I've something like three thousand dollars of my own now."

"Does it make you feel very rich?" Mrs. Bailly asked.

He laughed.

"It's a tiny start, but I won't need half of it to get through the winter."

Bailly lighted his pipe, stretched his legs, and pondered.

"You're giving the laundry up," he said, finally, "because—because it savours of service?"

George didn't get angry. He couldn't with Squibs in the first place; and, in the second, hadn't that thought been at the bottom of his mind ever since Dalrymple's remark about dirty hands?

"I don't need it any more," he said, "and I'd like to have you dispose of it where it will do the most good."

His voice hardened.

"But to somebody who wants to climb, not to any wild-eyed fellow who thinks he sees salvation in pulling down."

"You've just returned from the world," Bailly said, "and all you've brought is three thousand dollars and a bad complexion. I wish you'd directed your steps to a coal mine. You'd have come back richer."

XXIII

Goodhue got in a few hours after George. There was a deep satisfaction in their greetings. They were glad to be together, facing varsity football, looking ahead to the pleasures and excitements of another year, but George would have been happier if he could have shared his room-mate's unconcern about the clubs. Of course, Goodhue was settled. Did he know about George? George was glad the other couldn't guess how carefully he had calculated the situation—to take the best, or a dignified stand against all clubs with Allen getting behind him with all the poor and unknown men. But wasn't that exactly Wandel's game?

Stringham and Green were glad enough to see him, but Green thought he had been thoughtless not to have kept a football in the office for kicking goals through transoms.

It was good to feel the vapours of the market-place leaving his lungs and brain. Goodhue and he, during the easy preliminary work, resumed their runs. He felt he hadn't really gone back. If he didn't get hurt he would do things that fall that would drive the perplexed frown from Bailly's forehead, that would win Betty's applause and Sylvia's admiration. Whatever happened he was going to take care of her brother in the Yale game.

Betty was rather too insistent about that. She had fallen into the habit again of stopping George and Goodhue on their runs for a moment's gossip.

"See here, Betty," Goodhue laughed once, "you're rather too interested in this Eli Planter."

George had reached the same conclusion—but why should it bother him? It was logical that Betty and

Lambert should be drawn together. He blamed himself for a habit of impatience that had grown upon him. Had it come out of the strain of the Street, or was it an expression of his knowledge that now, at the commencement of his second year, he approached the culmination of his entire college course? With the club matter settled there would remain little for him save a deepening of useful friendships and a squeezing of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and a proper manner. For the same cause, the approaching election of officers for Sophomore year was of vital importance. It was generally conceded that the ticket put through now, barring accident, would be elected senior year to go out into the world at the head of the class. The presidency would graduate a man with a patent of nobility, as one might say. George guessed that all of Wandel's intrigues led to the re-election of Goodhue. He wanted that influential office in his own crowd. Even now George couldn't wholly sound Wandel's desires with him. He yielded to the general interest and uneasiness. Squibs had been right. Princeton did hold a fair sample of it all. He understood that very much as this affair was arranged he would see the political destinies of the country juggled later.

Allen got him alone, begging for his decision.

"Have you been asked for a club yet?"

"None of your business," George said, promptly.

"You've got to make up your mind in a hurry," Allen urged. "Promise me now that you'll leave the clubs alone, then I can handle Mr. Wandel."

"You're dickering with him?" George asked, quickly.

"No. Mr. Wandel is trying to dicker with me."

But George couldn't make up his mind. There were other problems as critical as the clubs. Could he afford to fight Dick Goodhue for that high office? If only he could find out what the Goodhue crowd thought of him!

He had an opportunity to learn one evening, and conquered a passionate desire to eavesdrop. As he ran lightly up the stairs to his room he heard through the open study door Wandel and Goodhue talking with an unaccustomed heat.

"You can't take such an attitude," Wandel was saying.

"I've taken it."

"Change your mind," Wandel urged. "I've nursed him along as the only possible tie between two otherwise irreconcilable elements of the class. I tell you I can't put you over unless you come to your senses."

George hurried in and nodded. From their faces he gathered there had been a fair row. Wandel grasped his arm. George stiffened. Something was coming now. It wasn't quite what he had expected.

"How would you like," Wandel said, "to be the very distinguished secretary of your class?"

George gazed from the window at the tree-bordered lawns where lesser men contentedly kicked footballs to each other.

"It ought to be what the class likes," he muttered. "I'm really only interested in seeing Dicky re-elected."

"If," Wandel said, "I told you it couldn't be done without your distinguished and untrammelled name

on the ticket?"

George flushed.

"What do you mean by untrammelled?"

"You stop that, Spike," Goodhue said, more disturbed than George had ever seen him. "It's indecent. I won't have it."

George relaxed. Untrammelled had certainly meant free from the taint of the clubs. He was grateful Goodhue had interfered.

"Why don't you run for something yourself, Mr. Wandel?" he asked, dryly.

Goodhue laughed.

"Carry your filthy politics somewhere else."

He and George, with an affectation of good nature, pushed Wandel out of the room. They looked at each other. Neither said anything.

George had to call upon his will to keep his attention on his books that night. In return for Allen's support for Goodhue Wandel wanted to give Allen for a minor place on the ticket a poor man untrammelled by the clubs. The realization angered George. Aside from any other consideration he couldn't permit himself to be bartered about to save any one—even Goodhue. But was Goodhue trying to spare him at a sacrifice? George, with a vast relief, decided that that was so when Goodhue mentioned casually one day that he was a certainty for the club.

"Don't say anything about it," he advised. "The upper classmen have been getting a few of us together. I'm glad you're among us. We'll elect the full section

later."

"Of course I came here a stranger," George began, trying to hide his pleasure.

"Quite a lot of us have learned to know you pretty well," Goodhue smiled.

George wouldn't accept this coveted gift without putting himself on record.

"I needn't ask you," he said, "if Dalrymple's already in."

Goodhue shook his head.

"Maybe later."

"I think," George said, distinctly, "that the men who are responsible for my election should know I'll hold out against Dalrymple."

"You're a conscientious beggar," Goodhue laughed. "It's your own business now, but there'll be a nice little rumpus just the same."

George was conscientious with Allen, too.

"I feel I ought to tell you," he said, "that I've made up my mind, if I'm asked, to join a club. Anything that has so much to offer can't be as bad as you think."

Without answering Allen flushed and walked off angrily.

It was the next day that the parties gathered on the top floor of Dickinson Hall for the election. George went as an amused spectator. He had played the game on the level and had destroyed his own chances, but he was afraid he had destroyed Goodhue's, too, or Goodhue had destroyed his own

by insisting on taking George into the club. That was a sacrifice George wanted to repay.

Wandel, as usual, was undisturbed. Allen's angular figure wandered restlessly among the groups. George had no idea what the line-up was.

George sensed weakness in the fact that, when the nominations were opened, Wandel was the first on his feet. He recited Goodhue's virtues as an athlete and a scholar. Like a real political orator at a convention he examined his record as president the previous year. He placed him in nomination amid a satisfactory applause. Now what was coming? Who did Allen have?

When he arose Allen wore an air of getting through with a formality. He insisted on the fact that his candidate was working his way through college, and would always be near the top scholastically. He represented a section of the class that the more fortunate of the students were prone to forget. And so on—a condensation of his complaints to George. The room filled with suspense, which broke into loud laughter when Allen named a man of absolutely no importance or colour, who couldn't poll more than the votes of his personal friends. A trick, George guessed it, and everyone else. But Wandel was quickly moving that the nominations be closed. Allen glanced around with a worried, expectant air. Then George saw that Rogers was up—a flushed, nervous figure—and had got the floor. He spoke rapidly, nearly unintelligibly.

"My candidate doesn't need any introduction," he recited. "All factions can unite on him—the man that smashed the Yale and Harvard Freshmen. The man who is going to smash the Yale and Harvard varsities

this year—George Morton!"

A cheer burst out, loud, from the heart. George saw that it came from both sides. The poor men had been stampeded, too.

Goodhue was on his feet, his arms upraised, demanding recognition. Suddenly George realized what this meant to Goodhue, and temper replaced his amazement. He sprang up, shouting:

"I won't have it——"

A dozen pairs of hands dragged him down. A dozen voices cried in his ears:

"Shut up, you damned fool!"

XXIV

Goodhue got the floor and withdrew his name, but the chairman wouldn't see or hear George. He declared the nominations closed. It was as if he and all the lesser men, who weren't leading factions, had seen in George the one force that could pull the class together. The vote was perfunctory, and Allen lazily moved to make it unanimous. George took the chair, frowning, altogether unhappy in his unforeseen victory. He had a feeling of having shabbily repaid Goodhue's loyalty and sacrifice, yet it hadn't been his fault; but would Goodhue know that?

"Speech! Shoot something, George! Talk up there, Mr. President!"

He'd give them a speech to chew over.

"Back-door politicians have done their best to split the class. The class has taken matters into its own

hands. There isn't going to be a split. It won't be long before you'll have Prospect Street off your minds. That seems to be two thirds of the trouble. Let's forget it, and pull together, and leave Princeton a little better than we found it. If you think anything needs reform let's talk about it openly and sensibly, clubs and all. I appreciate the honour, but Dick Goodhue ought to have had it, would have had it, if he hadn't been born with a silver spoon. Ought a man's wealth or poverty stand against him here? Think it over. That's all."

There was no opposition to Goodhue's election as Secretary.

Allen slipped to George at the close of the meeting.

"About what I'd have expected of you, anyway."

But George was looking for Goodhue, found him, and walked home with him.

"Best thing that could have happened," Goodhue said. "They're all marvelling at your nerve for talking about Prospect Street as you did."

George spied Rogers, and beckoned the freshly prominent youth.

"See here, young man, please come to my room after practice."

Rogers, with a frightened air, promised. Wandel appeared before, quite as if nothing had happened. He wouldn't even talk about the election.

"Just the same, Warwick," George said, "I'm not at all sure a poler named Allen couldn't tell you something about juggling crowns."

"A penetrating as well as a great president," Wandel smiled. "I haven't thanked you yet for joining our club."

George looked straight at him.

"But I've thanked Dicky for it," he said.

Rogers, when he arrived after Wandel's departure, didn't want to confess, but George knew how to get it out of him.

"You've put your finger in my pie without my consent," he said. "I'll hold that against you unless you talk up. Besides, it won't go beyond Goodhue and me. It's just for our information."

"All right," Rogers agreed, nervously, "provided it doesn't go out of this room. And there's no point mentioning names. A man we all know came to me this morning and talked about the split in the class. He couldn't get Goodhue elected because he didn't have any way of buying the support of the poor men. Allen, he figured, was going to nominate a lame duck, and then have somebody not too rich and not too poor spring his own name, figuring he would get the votes of the bulk of the class which just can't help being jealous of Goodhue and his little crowd. This chap thought he could beat Allen at that game by stampeding the class for you before Allen could get himself up, and he wanted somebody representative of the bulk of the class, that holds the balance of power, to put you in nomination. He figured even the poor men would flock to you in spite of Allen's opposition."

"And what did he offer you?" George sneered.

Rogers turned away without answering.

"Like Driggs," Goodhue said, when Rogers had gone. "He couldn't have what he wanted, but he got about as good. Politically, what's the difference? Both offices are in his crowd, but he's avoided making you look like his president."

George grinned.

"I don't wonder you call him Spike."

XXV

George, filled with a cold triumph, stared for a long time at Sylvia's portrait that night. If she thought of him at all she would have to admit he had come closer. At Princeton he was as big a man as her rich brother was at Yale. He belonged to a club where her own kind gathered. Give him money—and he was going to have that—and her attitude must alter. He bent the broken crop between his fingers, his triumph fading. He had come closer, but not close enough to hurt.

The Baillys and Betty congratulated him at practice the next day.

"You were the logical man," Betty said, "but the politicians didn't seem to want you."

Bailly drew him aside.

"It was scandal in the forum," he said, "that money and the clubs were an issue in this election."

George fingered his headgear, laughing unpleasantly.

"Yes, and they elected a poor man; a low sort of a fellow with a shadowed past."

"Forget your past," Bailly pled, "and remember in the present that the poor men, who helped elect you, are looking for your guidance. They need help."

"Then," George said, "why didn't they get themselves elected so they could help themselves?"

"Into the world there are born many cripples," Bailly said, softly. "Would you condemn them for not running as fast as the congenitally sound?"

"Trouble is, they don't try to run," George answered.

He looked at the other defiantly. Bailly had to know. It was his right.

"I can guess what house I'm going to on Prospect Street."

"Which?" Bailly sighed.

"To the very home of reaction," George laughed. "But it's easier to reform from the inside."

"No," Bailly said, gravely. "The chairs are too comfortable."

He pressed George's arm.

"It isn't the clubs here that worry me in relation to you. It's the principle of the lights behind the railing in the restless world. Try not to surrender to the habit of the guarded light."

George was glad when Stringham called from the field.

"Jump in here, Morton!"

He took his turn at the dummy scrimmage. Such exercise failed to offer its old zest, nor was it the first

day he had appreciated that. The intrusion of these unquiet struggles might be responsible, yet, with them determined in his favour, his anxiety did not diminish. Was Bailly to blame with his perpetual nagging about the outside world where grave decisions waited? George frankly didn't want to face them. They seemed half-decipherable signposts which tempted him perplexingly and precariously from his path. What had just happened, added to the passage of a year and his summer in Wall Street, had brought that headlong world very close, had outlined too clearly the barriers which made it dangerous; so even here he spent some time each night studying the changing lines in the battle for money.

Yet Goodhue, with a settled outlook, shared George's misgivings at the field.

"It isn't the fun it was Freshman year," he grumbled one night. "We used to complain then that they worked us too hard. Now I don't believe they work us hard enough."

That was a serious doubt for two men who realized they alone might save inferior if eager material from defeat; and it grew until they resumed surreptitiously the extra work they had attempted hitherto only outside of the season or just at its commencement. Then it had not interfered with Green's minutely studied scheme of physical development. Now it did. The growth of their worry, moreover, measured the decline of their condition. These apprehensions had a sharper meaning for George than for his room-mate. Almost daily he saw his picture on the sporting pages of newspapers. "Morton of Princeton, the longest kicker in the game." "The keystone of the Princeton attack." "The man picked to lead Stringham's hopes

to victory over Harvard and Yale." And so on. Exaggeration, George told himself, that would induce the university, the alumni, the Baillys, Betty, and Sylvia—most of all Sylvia—to expect more than he could reasonably give at his best.

"Don't forget you've promised to take care of Lambert Planter——"

In some form Betty repeated it every time George saw her. It irritated him—not that it really made any difference—that Lambert Planter should occupy her mind to that extent. No emotion as impersonal as college spirit would account for it; and somehow it did make a difference.

George suspected the truth a few days before the Harvard game, and persuaded Goodhue to abandon all exercise away from Green's watchful eye; but he went on the field still listless, irritable, and stale.

That game, as so frequently happens, was the best played and the prettiest to watch of the season. George wondered if Sylvia was in the crowd. There was no question about her being at New Haven next week. He wanted to save his best for that afternoon when she would be sure to see him, when he would take her brother on for another thrashing. But it wasn't in him to hold back anything, and the cheering section, where Squibs sat, demanded all he had. To win this game, it became clear after the first few plays, would take an exceptional effort. Only George's long and well-calculated kicking held down the Harvard attack. Toward the close of the first half a fumble gave Princeton the ball on Harvard's thirty-yard line, and Goodhue for the first time seriously called on George to smash the Harvard defence. With his effort some of the old zest returned. Twice he

made it first down by inches.

"Stick to your interference," Goodhue was begging him between each play.

Then, with his interference blocked and tumbling, George yielded to his old habit, and slipped off to one side at a hazard. The enemy secondary defence had been drawing in, and there was no one near enough to stop him within those ten yards, and he went over for a touchdown, and casually kicked the goal.

When, a few minutes later, he walked off the field, he experienced no elation. He realized all at once how tired he was. Like a child he wanted to go to Stringham and say:

"Stringham, I don't want to play any more games to-day. I want to lie down and rest."

He smiled as he dreamed of Stringham's reply.

It was Stringham, really, who came to him as he sat silently and with drooping shoulders in the dressing-room.

"What's wrong here? When you're hurt I want to know it."

George got up.

"I'm not hurt. I'm all right."

Green arrived and helped Stringham poke while George submitted, wishing they'd leave him alone so he could sit down and rest.

"We've got to have him next week," Stringham said, "but this game isn't won by a long shot."

"What's the matter with me?" George asked. "I'll play."

He heard a man near by remark:

"He's got the colour of a Latin Salutatorian."

They let him go back, nevertheless, and at the start he suffered his first serious injury. He knew when he made the tackle that the strap of his headgear snapped. He felt the leather slide from his head, experienced the crushing of many bodies, had a brief conviction that the sun had been smothered. His next impression was of bare, white walls in a shaded room. His brain held no record of the hushing of the multitude when he had remained stretched in his darkness on the trampled grass; of the increasing general fear while substitutes had carried him from the field on a stretcher; or of the desertion of the game by the Baillys, by Betty and her father, by Wandel, the inscrutable, even by the revolutionary Allen, by a score of others, who had crowded the entrance of the dressing room asking hushed questions, and a few moments later had formed behind him a silent and frightened procession as he had been carried to the infirmary. Mrs. Bailly told him about it.

"I saw tears in Betty's eyes," she said, softly, "through my own. It was so like a funeral march."

"And you missed the end of the game?" George asked.

She nodded.

"When my husband knew Harvard had scored he said, 'That wouldn't have happened if George had been there.' And it wouldn't have."

But all George could think of was:

"Squibs missed half a game for me, and there were tears in Betty's eyes."

Tears, because he had suggested the dreadful protagonist of a funeral march.

His period of consciousness was brief. He drifted into the darkness once more, accompanied by that extraordinary and seductive vision of Betty in tears. It came with him late the next morning back into the light. Sylvia's portrait was locked in a drawer far across the campus. What superb luxury to lie here with such a recollection, forecasting no near physical effort, quite relaxed, dreaming of Betty, who had always meant rest as Sylvia had always meant unquiet and absorbing struggle.

He judged it wise to pretend to be asleep, but hunger at last made him stir and threw him into an anxious agitation of examinations by specialists, of conferences with coaches, and of doubts and prayers and exhortations from everyone admitted to the room; for even the specialists were Princeton men. They were non-committal. It had been a nasty blow. There had been some concussion. They would guarantee him in two weeks, but of course he didn't have that long. One old fellow turned suspiciously on Green.

"He was overworked when he got hurt."

"I'll be all right," George kept saying, "if you'll fix a headgear to cover my new soft spot."

And finally:

"I'll be all right if you'll only leave me alone."

Yet, when they had, Squibs came, totally forgetful of his grave problems of the classes, foreseeing no disaster nearly as serious as a defeat by Yale—"now that we've done so well against Harvard, and would have done better if you hadn't got hurt"—limping the length of the sick-room until the nurse lost her temper and drove him out. Then Goodhue arrived as the herald of Josiah Blodgett, of all people.

"This does me good," George pled with the nurse.

And it did. For the first time in a number of weeks he felt amused as Blodgett with a pinkish silk handkerchief massaged his round, unhealthy face.

"Thought you didn't like football," George said.

"Less reason to like it now," Blodgett jerked out. "Only sensible place to play it is the front yard of a hospital. Thought I'd come down and watch you and maybe look up what was left afterward."

George fancied a wavering of the little eyes in Goodhue's direction, and became even more amused, for he believed a more calculating man than Blodgett didn't live; yet there seemed a real concern in the man's insistence that George, with football out of the way, should spend a recuperative Thanksgiving at his country place. George thought he would. He was going to work again for Blodgett next summer.

Betty and Mrs. Bailly were the last callers the nurse would give in to, although she must have seen how they helped, one in a chair on either side of the bed; and it was difficult not to look at only one. In her eyes he sought for a souvenir of those tears, and wanted to tell her how sorry he was; but he wasn't really sorry, and anyway she mustn't guess that he

knew. Why had Mrs. Bailly bothered to tell him at all? Could her motherly instinct hope for a coming together so far beyond belief? His memory of the remote portrait reminded him that it was incredible in every way. He sighed. Betty beckoned Mrs. Bailly and rose.

"Don't go," George begged, aware that he ought to urge her to go.

"Betty was having tea with me," Mrs. Bailly offered.

"I would have asked to be brought anyway," Betty said, openly. "You frightened us yesterday. We've all wanted to find out the truth."

There was in her eyes now at least a reminiscent pain.

"Don't worry," he said, "I'll take care of Lambert Planter for you after all."

She stooped swiftly and offered her hand.

"You'll take care of yourself. It would be beastly if they let you play at the slightest risk."

He grasped her hand. The touch of her flesh, combined with such a memory, made him momentarily forgetful. He held her hand too long, too firmly. He saw the colour waver in her pale cheeks. He let her hand go, but he continued to watch her eyes until they turned uncertainly to Mrs. Bailly.

When they had left he slept again. He slept away his listlessness of the past few weeks. As he confided to his callers, who were confined to an hour in the afternoon, he did nothing but sleep and eat. He was more content than he had been since his indifferent

days, long past, at Oakmont. All these people had deserted the game for him when he was no longer of any use to the game. Then he had acquired, even for such clashing types as Wandel and Allen, a value that survived his football. He had advanced on a road where he had not consciously set his feet. He treasured that thought. Next Saturday he would reward these friends, for he was confident he could do it now. By Wednesday he was up and dressed, feeling better than he had since the commencement of the season. If only they didn't hurt his head again! The newspapers helped there, too. If he played, they said, it would be under a severe handicap. He smiled, knowing he was far fitter, except for his head, than he had been the week before.

Until the squad left for New Haven he continued to live in the infirmary, watching the light practice of the last days without even putting on his football clothes.

"The lay-off won't hurt me," he promised.

Stringham and Green were content to accept his judgment.

As soon as he was able he went to his room and got Sylvia's portrait. He disciplined himself for his temporary weakness following the accident. He tried to force from his memory the sentiment aroused by Betty's tears through the thought that he approached his first real chance to impress Sylvia. He could do it. He was like an animal insufficiently exercised, straining to be away.

XXVI

He alone, as the squad dressed in the gymnasium,

displayed no signs of misgiving. Here was the climax of the season. All the better. The larger the need the greater one's performance must be. But the others didn't share that simple faith.

He enjoyed the ride to the field in the cold, clear air, through hurrying, noisy, and colourful crowds. He liked the impromptu cheers they gave the team, sometimes himself particularly.

In the field dressing-room, like men condemned, the players received their final instructions. Already they were half beaten because they were going to face Yale—all but George, who knew he was going to play better than ever, because he was going to face one Yale man, Lambert Planter, with Sylvia in the stands. He kept repeating to himself:

"I will! I *will*!"

He laughed at the others.

"There aren't any wild beasts out there—just eleven men like ourselves. If there's going to be any wild-beasting let's do it to them."

They trotted through an opening into a vast place walled by men and women. At their appearance the walls seemed to disintegrate, and a chaotic noise went up as if from that ponderous convulsion.

George dug his toes into the moist turf and looked about. Sylvia was there, a tiny unit in the disturbed enclosure, but if she had sat alone it would have made no difference. His incentive would have been unaltered.

Again the convulsion, and the Yale team was on the field. George singled Planter out—the other man that

Sylvia would watch to-day. He did look fit, and bigger than last year. George shrugged his shoulders.

"I will!"

Nevertheless, he was grateful for his week of absolute rest. He smiled as the crowd applauded his long kicks to the backs. He wasn't exerting himself now.

The two captains went to the centre of the field while the teams trotted off. Lambert came up to George.

"The return match," he said, "and you won't want another."

George grinned.

"I've heard it's the Yale system to try to frighten the young opponent."

"You'll know more about the Yale system after the first half," Lambert said, and walked on.

George realized that Lambert hadn't smiled once. In his face not a trace of the old banter had shown. Yale system or Yale spirit, it possessed visible qualities of determination and peril, but he told himself he could lick Lambert and smile while doing it.

At the whistle he was off like a race horse, never losing sight of Lambert until he was reasonably sure the ball wouldn't get to him. They clashed personally almost at the start. Yale had the ball, and Lambert took it, and tore through the line, and lunged ahead with growing speed and power. George met him head on. They smashed to the ground. As he hugged Lambert there for a moment George whispered:

"Nothing fantastic about that, is there? Now get past me, Mr. Planter."

The tackle had been vicious. Lambert rose rather slowly to his feet.

George's kicks outdistanced Lambert's. Once he was forced by a Princeton fumble, and a march of thirty yards by Yale, to kick from behind his own goal line. He did exert himself then, and he outguessed the two men lying back. As a result Yale put the ball in play on her own thirty-yard line, while the stands marvelled, the Princeton side demonstratively, yet George, long before the half was over, became conscious of something not quite right. Since beyond question he was the star of his team he received a painstaking attention from the Yale men. There is plenty of legitimate roughness in football, and it can be concentrated. In every play he was reminded of the respect Yale had for him. Perpetually he tried to spare his head, but it commenced to ache abominably, and after a tackle by Lambert, to repay him for some of his own deadly and painful ones, he got up momentarily dazed.

"Let's do something now," he pled with Goodhue, when, thanks to his kicks, they had got the ball at midfield. He wanted a score before this silly weakness could put him out. With a superb skill he went after a score. His forward passes to Goodhue and the ends were well-conceived, beautifully executed, and frequently successful. Many times he took the ball himself, fighting through the line or outside of tackle to run against Lambert or another back. Once he got loose for a run of fifteen yards, dodging or shaking off half the Yale team while the stands with primeval ferocity approved and prayed.

That made it first down on Yale's five-yard line. He was absolutely confident that the Yale team could not prevent his taking the ball over in the next few plays.

"I will! I will! I will!" he said to himself.

Alone, he felt, he could overcome that five yards against the eleven of them.

"Let's have it, Dicky," he whispered. "I'm going over this play or the next. Shoot me outside of tackle."

On the first play Goodhue fumbled, and a Yale guard fell on the ball. George stared, stifling an instinct to destroy his friend. The chance had been thrown away, and his head made him suffer more and more. Then he saw that Goodhue wanted to die, and as they went back to place themselves for the Yale kick, George said:

"You've proved we can get through them. Next time!"

Would there be a next time? And Goodhue didn't seem to hear. With all his enviable inheritance and training he failed to conceal a passionate remorse; his conviction of a peculiar and unforgivable criminality.

In the dressing-room a few minutes later some of the players bitterly recalled that ghastly error, and a coach or two turned furiously on the culprit. It was too bad Squibs and Allen weren't there to watch George's white temper, an emotion he didn't understand himself, born, he tried to explain it later, of his hurt head.

"Cut that out!" he snarled.

The temper of one of the coaches—an assistant—

flamed back.

"It was handing the game on a——"

George reached out and caught the shoulders of that man who during the season had ordered him around. The ringing in his head, the increasing pain, had destroyed all memory of discipline.

"Say another word and I'll throw you out of here."

The room fell silent. Some men gasped. The coach shrank from the furious face, tried to elude the powerful grasp. Stringham hurried up. George let the other go.

"Mr. Stringham," he said, quietly, "if there's any more of this I'll quit right now, and so will the rest of the team if they've any pluck."

Stringham motioned the coach away, soothed George, led him to a chair, where Green and a doctor got off his battered headgear. George wanted to scream, but he conquered the brimming impulse, and managed to speak rationally.

"You've done all you can for us. We've got to play the game ourselves, and we're not giving anything away. We're not making any mistakes we can help."

Goodhue came up and gripped his shoulder. The touch quieted him.

"This man oughtn't to go back, Green," the doctor announced.

George stiffened. He hadn't made that score. He hadn't smashed Lambert Planter half enough. Better to leave the field on a stretcher, and in darkness again, than to quit like this: to walk out between the

halves; not to walk back. He began to lie, overcoming a physical agony of which he had never imagined his powerful body capable.

"No, that doesn't hurt, nor that," he replied, calmly, to the doctor's questions. "Don't think I'm nutty because I lost my temper. My head's all right. That gear's fine."

So they let him go back, and he counted the plays, willing himself to receive and overcome the pounding each down brought him, continuing by pure force of will to outplay Lambert; to save his team from dangerous gains, from possible scores; nearly breaking away himself half-a-dozen times, although the Princeton eleven was tiring and much of the play was in its territory.

The sun had gone behind heavy clouds. A few snowflakes fluttered down. It was nearly dark. In spite of his exertions he felt cold, and knew it for an evil sign. Once or twice he shivered. His throbbing head gave him an illusion of having grown enormously so that it got in everybody's way. Instinctively he caught a Yale forward pass on his own thirty-yard line and tore off, slinging tacklers aside with the successful fury of a young bull all of whose dangerous actions are automatic. He had come a long way. He didn't know just how far, but the Yale goal posts were near. Then, quite consciously, he saw Lambert Planter cutting across to intercept him. The meeting of the two was unavoidable. He thought he heard Lambert's voice.

"Not past me!"

Lambert plunged for the tackle. George's right hand shot out and smashed open against Lambert's face.

He raced on, leaving Lambert sprawled and clawing at the ground.

The quarterback managed to bring him down on the eight-yard line, then lost him; yet, before George could get to his feet others had pounced, and his heavy, awkward head had crashed against the earth again.

They dragged him to his feet. For a few moments he lurched about, shaking off friendly hands.

"Only five minutes more, George," somebody prayed.

Only five minutes! Good God! For him each moment was a century of unspeakable martyrdom. Flecks of rain or snow touched his face, lifted in revolt. The contact, wet and cold, cleared his brain a trifle—let in the screaming of the multitude, hoarse and incoherent, raised at first in thanksgiving for his run, then, after its close, altering to menacing disappointment and command. What business had they to tell him what to do? Up there, warm and comfortable, undergoing no exercise more violent than occasional excited rising and sitting down, they had the selfish impudence to order him to make a touchdown. Why should he obey, or even try? He had done his job, more than any one could reasonably have asked of him. He had outplayed Lambert, gained more ground than any man on the field, made more valuable tackles. Could he really impress Sylvia any further? Why shouldn't he walk off now in the face of those unjust commands to the rest he had earned and craved with all his body and mind?

"Touchdown! Touchdown! Touchdown! Morton! Morton! Morton!"

Damn them! Why not, indeed, walk off, where he wouldn't have to listen to that thoughtless and autocratic impertinence?

He glanced down at his blackened hands, at his filthy breeches, at his jersey striped about the sleeves with orange; and with a wave of self-loathing he knew why he couldn't go. He had sworn never to wear anything like livery again, yet here he was—in livery, a servant to men and women who asked dreadful things without troubling even to approximate the agony of obedience.

"I'll not be a servant," he had told Bailly.

Bailly had made him one after all, and an old phrase of the tutor's slipped back:

"Some day, young man, you'll learn that the world lives by service."

George had not believed. Now for a moment his half-conscious brain knew Bailly had been right. He had to serve.

He knocked aside the sponge Green held to his face. He indicated the bucket of cold water the trainer had carried out.

"Throw it over my head," he said, "the whole thing. Throw it hard."

Green obeyed. He, too, who ought to have understood, was selfish and imperious.

"You make a touchdown!" he commanded hoarsely.

The water stung George's eyes, rushed down his neck in thrilling streams, braced him for the time. The teams lined up while the Princeton stands roared

approval that their best servant should remain on the job.

Goodhue called the signal for a play around the left tackle. Every Yale player was confident that George would take the ball, sensed the direction of the play, and, over-anxious, massed there, all but the quarter, who lay back between the goal posts. George saw, and turned sharply, darting to the right. Suddenly he knew, because of that over-anxiety of Yale, that he had a touchdown. Only the Yale quarterback had a chance for the tackle, and he couldn't stop George in that distance.

Out of the corner of his eye George noticed Goodhue standing to the right and a little behind. He, too, must have seen the victorious outcome of the play, and George caught in his attitude again that air of a unique criminal. They'd hold that fumble against Dicky forever unless—if Goodhue had the ball the Yale quarter couldn't even get his hands on him until he had crossed the line.

"Dicky!"

The dejected figure sprang into action. Without weighing his sacrifice, without letting himself think of the crime of disobeying a signal, of the risks of a hurried throw or of another fumble, George shot the ball across, then forged ahead and put the Yale quarterback out of the play, while Goodhue strolled across the line and set the ball down behind the goal posts.

As he went back to kick the goal George heard through the crashing cacophony from the stands Goodhue's uncertain voice:

"Why didn't you make that touchdown yourself? It was yours. You had it. You had earned it."

"It was the team's," George answered, shortly. "I might have been spilled. Sure thing for you."

"You precious idiot!" Goodhue whispered.

As George kicked the goal there came to him again, across his pain, that sensation of being on a road he had not consciously set out to explore. He wondered why he was so well content.

Eternity ended. With the whistle and the crunching of the horn George staggered to his feet. Goodhue and another player supported him while the team clustered for a cheer for Yale. The Princeton stands were a terrific avalanche descending upon that little group. Green tried to rescue him, shouting out his condition; but the avalanche wouldn't have it. It dashed upon him, tossed him shoulder high, while it emitted crashing noises out of which his name emerged.

Goodhue was up also, and the others. Goodhue was gesturing and talking, pointing in his direction. Soon Goodhue and the others were down. The happy holocaust centred its efforts on George. Why? Had Goodhue given things away about that touchdown? Anyhow, they knew how to reward their servants, these people.

They carried George on strong shoulders at the head of their careening procession. His dazed brain understood that they desired to honour the man who had done the giant's share, the one who had made victory possible, and he sensed a wrong, a sublime ignorance or indifference that they should carry only

him. The victory went back of George Morton. He bent down, screaming into the ears of his bearers.

"Squibs Bailly! He found me. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have played to-day. Bailly, or let me down! Bailly made that run! I tell you, Bailly played that game!"

In his earnestness he grew hysterical.

Maybe it was because they wanted to humour the hero, or perhaps they caught his own hysteria, realizing what Bailly had done for him. They stopped in front of the stands to which Bailly's bad foot had condemned him during this triumphant march. They commenced a high-pitched, frantic chant.

"We want Squibs Bailly! We want Squibs Bailly! We want Squibs Bailly!"

George waved his hands, holding the column until the slender figure, urged by the spectators remaining in the stands, came down with difficulty and embarrassment to be caught and lifted tenderly up beside George.

Then, with these two aloft in the very front, the wild march was resumed through the Yale goal posts while Squibs' wrinkled face twitched, while in his young eyes burned the unsurpassable light of a hopeless wish miraculously come true.

XXVII

Green rescued George when his head was drooping and his eyes blurred. He got him to the gymnasium and stretched him out there and set the doctors to work on his head.

A voice got into George's brain. Who was talking? Was it Goodhue, or Stringham?

"I guess you can see him, but he's pretty vague. Played the whole game with a broken head. Lied to the doctors."

George forced his eyes open. Lambert Planter, still in his stained football clothes, bent over him.

"Hello, Planter!"

Lambert grasped the black hand.

"Hello, George Morton!"

That was all. Lambert went away, but George knew that what he had really said was:

"It's only what you've made of yourself that counts."

XXVIII

At Princeton they kept him in the infirmary for a few days, but he didn't like it. It filled him with a growing fear. Since it made no particular difference now how long he was ill, they let him see too many callers. He distrusted hero worship. Most of all was he afraid when such devotion came from Betty.

"Being a vicarious hero," Mrs. Bailly said, "has made my husband the happiest man in Princeton."

After that she didn't enter the conversation much, and again George sensed, with a reluctant thrill, a maternal caring in her heart for him.

"You never ought to have gone back in the second half," Betty said.

"If I hadn't," he laughed, "who would have taken care of Lambert Planter for you?"

"Squibs says you might have been killed."

"He's a great romancer," George exploded.

"Just the same, it was splendid of you to play at all."

She touched the white bandage about his head.

"Does it hurt a great deal?"

"No," he said, nearly honestly. "I only let them keep me here to cut some dull lectures."

He glanced at Betty wistfully.

"Did I take care of Lambert Planter as you wanted?"

She glanced away.

"Are you punishing me? Haven't you read the papers? You outplayed him and every man on the field."

"That was what you wished?"

She turned back with an assumption of impatience.

"What do you mean?"

He couldn't tell her. He couldn't probe further into her feelings for Lambert, her attitude toward himself. He had to get his mind in hand again.

Betty brought her mother one day. Mrs. Alston was full of praise, but she exuded an imperial distaste for his sick-room. Both times he had to overcome an impulse to beg Betty not to go so soon. That more than anything else made him afraid of himself. It was, he felt, an excellent change to escape to an

active life.

Blodgett's place gave him a massive, tasteless welcome. It was one of those houses with high, sloping roofs, numerous chimneys, and much sculptured stone, slightly reminiscent of Mansart, and enormously suggestive of that greatest architect of all, the big round dollar. In its grounds it fitted like a huge diamond on a flowered shirt-front. There were terraces; and a sunken garden, a little self-conscious with coy replicas of regency sculpture; and formal walks between carefully barbered trees and hedges. It convinced George that his original choice of three necessities had been wise. Blodgett had the money, but he didn't have Squibs Bailly and Goodhue or the things they personified. And how Blodgett coveted The Goodhue Quality! George told himself that was why he had been asked, because he was so close to Goodhue. But Blodgett let him see that there was another motive. After those games George was temporarily one of the nation's famous men.

It wasn't until he had arrived that George understood how near Blodgett's place was to Oakmont—not more than fifteen miles. He was interested, but he had no idea, even if the Planters were there for Thanksgiving, that he would see any of them.

At Blodgett's bachelor enormity people came and went. At times the huge, over-decorated rooms were filled, yet to George they seemed depressingly empty because he knew they didn't enclose the men and the women Blodgett wanted. Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair, indeed, motored out for Thanksgiving dinner—a reluctant concession, George gathered, to a profitable partnership. Blodgett brought him forth as a

specimen, and the specimen impressed, for it isn't given to everyone to sit down at the close of the season with the year's most famous football player. It puzzled George that in the precious qualities he craved he knew himself superior to everyone in the house except these two who made him feel depressingly inferior. Would he some day reach the point where he would react unconsciously, as they did, to every social emergency?

When the dinner party had scattered, Blodgett and he walked alone on the terrace in an ashen twilight. There the surprise was sprung. It was clearly no surprise to his host, who beamed at George, pointing to the drive.

"I 'phoned him he would find an old football friend here if he'd take the trouble to drive over."

"But you didn't tell him my name?" George gasped.

"No, but why——"

Blodgett broke off and hurried his heavy body to the terrace edge to greet these important arrivals.

Lambert sprang from the runabout he had driven up and helped Sylvia down. She was bundled in becoming furs. The sharp air had heightened her rich colouring. How beautiful she was—lovelier than George had remembered! Here was the tonic to kill the distracting doubts raised by Betty. Here was the very spring of his wilful ambition. Glancing at Sylvia, Betty's tranquil influence lost its power.

At her first recognition of him she stopped abruptly, but Lambert ran across and grasped his hand.

"How do, Morton. Never guessed Blodgett's message

referred to you."

George disapproved of Blodgett's methods. Why had the man made him a mystery at the very moment he used him as a bait to attract Lambert and Sylvia? Wasn't he important enough, or was it only because he was a Princeton man and Blodgett had feared some enmity might linger?

Lambert's manner, at least, was proof that he had, indeed, meant to give George a message that night in the dressing-room at New Haven. George appreciated that "How do, Morton"—greeting at last of a man for a man instead of a man for a servant or a former servant; nor was Lambert's call to his sister without a significance nearly sharp enough to hurt.

"Sylvia! Didn't you meet this strong-armed Princetonian at Betty's dance a year ago?"

George understood that she had no such motives as Lambert's for altering her attitude, so much more uncompromising from the beginning than his. There had been no contact or shared pain. Only what she might have observed from a remote stand that Saturday could have affected her. How would she respond now?

She advanced slowly, at first bewildered, then angry. But Blodgett had nothing but his money to recommend him to her. She wouldn't, George was certain, bare any intimacies of emotion before him.

"I rather think I did."

In her eyes George recognized the challenge he had last seen there.

"Thanks for remembering me," he said rather in

Wandel's manner.

"A week ago Saturday——" she began, uncertainly, as though her remembering needed an apology.

"Who could forget the great Morton?" Lambert laughed. "With a broken head he beat Yale. That was a hard game to lose."

"I'd heard," she said, indifferently, "that you had been hurt."

George would have preferred words as ugly and unforgettable as those she had attacked him with the day of her accident. She turned to Blodgett. George had an instinct to shake her as she chatted easily and casually, glancing at him from time to time. He could have borne it better if she hadn't included him at all.

He was glad her brother occupied him. Lambert was for dissecting each play of the game, and he made no attempt to hide the admiration for George it had aroused. He gave the impression that he knew very well men didn't do such things—particularly that little trick with Goodhue—unless they were the right sort.

Blodgett said something about tea. They strolled into the house. A fire burned in the great hall. That was the only light. George came last, directly after Sylvia.

"So you're a friend of Mr. Blodgett's!" she said with an intonation intended to hurt.

"I wouldn't have expected," he answered, easily, "to find you a caller here."

She paused and faced him. Lights from the distant fire got as far as her face, disclosing her contempt. He wouldn't let her speak.

"I won't have you think I had anything to do with bringing you. I never guessed until I saw your brother drive up."

She didn't believe him, or she tried to impress him with that affront. Blodgett and Lambert had gone on into the library. They remained quite alone in the huge, dusky hall, whose shadow masses shifted as the fire blazed and fell. For the first time since their ancient rides he could talk to her undisturbed. He wouldn't let that fact tie his tongue. She couldn't call him "stable boy" now, although she did try to say "beast" in another way. This solitude in the dusk, shared with her, stripped every distracting thought from his mind. He was as hard as steel and happy in his inflexibility.

"You believe me," he said.

She shook her head and turned for the door.

"Let me say one thing," he urged. "It's rather important."

She came back through the shadows, her attitude reminiscent of the one she had assumed long ago when she had sought to hurt him. He caught his breath, waiting.

"There is nothing," she said, shivering a little in spite of the hall's warmth and the furs she still wore, "that you would think of saying to me if you had changed at all from the impertinent groom I had to have discharged."

He laughed.

"Oh! Call me anything you please, only I've always wanted to thank you for not making a scene at Miss

Alston's dance a year ago."

He would be disappointed if that failed to hurt back. The thought of Sylvia Planter making a scene! At least it fanned her temper.

"What is there," she threatened, defensively, "to prevent my telling Mr. Blodgett, any one I please, now?"

"Nothing, except that I'm a trifle more on my feet," he answered. "I'm not sure your scandal would blow me over. We're going to meet again frequently. It can't he helped."

"I never want," she said, as if speaking of something unclean and revolting, "to see you again."

His chance had come.

"You're unfair, because it was you yourself, Miss Planter, who warned me I shouldn't forget. I haven't. I won't. Will you? Can't we shake hands on that understanding?"

With a hurried movement she hid her hands.

"I couldn't touch you——"

"You will when we dance."

He thought her lips trembled a little, but the light was uncertain.

"I will never dance with you again."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," he said with a confident smile, "unless you care to make a scene."

She drew away, unfastening her cloak, her eyes full of that old challenge.

"You're impossible," she whispered. "Can't you understand that I dislike you?"

His heart leapt, for didn't he hate her?

XXIX

Lambert appeared in the doorway.

"Blodgett's rung for tea——"

He glanced curiously from one to the other. The broken shadows disclosed little, but the fact that she had lingered at all was arresting.

"What's up, Sylvia?"

She went close to her brother.

"This—this old servant has been impertinent again."

Lambert smiled.

"He's rather more than that now, sis. That's over—forgotten. Still if the Princeton fellow Morton's been impertinent——"

He spread his arms, smiling.

"Have I got to submit myself to a trouncing more than once a year?"

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders.

"No," she said, impatiently. "You say it's forgotten. All right."

George knew it would never be forgotten now by either of them. Lambert's unruffled attitude made him uneasy. Her brother's scoffing response to her accusation suggested that Lambert saw, since they

would be more or less thrown together, a beneficial side to such encounters as the one just ended. For George didn't dream that Lambert had forgotten, either, those old boasts.

Another depressing thought made him bad company for Blodgett after the callers had driven away. It came from a survey, following his glimpse of Sylvia's beauty, of all the blatant magnificence with which Blodgett had surrounded himself. Blodgett after dinner, a little flushed with wine, and the triumph of having had in his house on the same day two Sinclairs and two Planters, attempted an explanation.

"I didn't build this, Morton, or my place in town, just for Josiah Blodgett."

George wasn't in a mood for subtleties of expression.

"I've often wondered why you haven't married. With your money you ought to have a big choice."

Blodgett sipped a liqueur. He smiled in a self-satisfied way.

"Money will buy about anything—even the kind of a wife you want. I'm in no hurry. When I marry, young man, it will be the right kind."

And George understood that he meant by the right kind some popular and well-bred girl who would make the Blodgett family hit a social average.

He carried that terrifying thought of marriage back to Princeton. He had no fear Sylvia would ever look seriously in Blodgett's direction. Money could scarcely bribe her. This, however, was her second season. Of course she would marry someone of her own immediate circle. She could take her choice.

When that happened what would become of his determination and his boasts? Frequently he clenched her riding crop and swore:

"Nothing—not even that—can keep me from accomplishing what I've set out to do. I'll have my way with her."

He shrank, nevertheless, from the thought of her adopting such a defence. It was intolerable. He read the New York papers with growing suspense. As an antidote he attacked harder than ever his study of cause and effect in the Street. With football out of the way he could give a good deal of time to that, and Blodgett now and then enclosed a hint in Mundy's letters. It was possible to send a fair amount of money to his parents; but his mother's letters never varied from their formality of thanks and solicitations as to his health. His father didn't write at all. Of course, they couldn't understand what he was doing. The shadow of the great Planter remained perpetually over their little home.

Another doubt troubled George. With the club matter out of the way, and the presidency of the class his, and a full football garland resting on his head, was he wasting his time at Princeton? The remembrance of Blodgett steadied him. He needed all that Princeton and its companionships could give.

Purposefully he avoided Betty. Was she, indeed, responsible for that softness he had yielded to in the infirmary and during the final game? In his life, he kept telling himself, there was no room for sentiment. Sentiment was childish, a hindrance. Hadn't he decided at the start that nothing should turn him from his attempt for the summit? Still he couldn't avoid seeing Betty now and then in

Princeton, or at the dances in New York to which he went with Goodhue. The less he saw of Betty, moreover, the stronger grew his feeling of something essential lacking from his life; and it bothered that, after a long separation, she was invariably friendly instead of reproachful. He found that he couldn't look at her eyes without hungrily trying to picture them wet with tears for him.

To some extent other demands took his mind from such problems. The rumpus Goodhue had foreseen developed. Important men came or wrote from New York or Philadelphia in Dalrymple's cause, but at the meetings of the section George sat obdurate, and, when the struggle approached a crisis, Goodhue came out openly on the side of his room-mate.

"You can have Dalrymple in the club," was George's ultimatum, "or you can have me, but you can't have us both."

If George resigned, Goodhue announced, he would follow. Dalrymple was doomed. The important men went back or ceased writing. Then Wandel slipped Rogers into the charmed circle—the payment of a debt; and George laughed and left the meeting, saying:

"You can elect anybody you please now."

Cynically, he was tempted to try to force Allen in.

"You're not honest even with your own group," he said afterward to Wandel.

The club lost its value as a marker of progress. Besides, he didn't look forward to eating with that little snob, Rogers, for two years. Nor did he quite care for Wandel's reply.

"You've enough class-consciousness for both of us, heroic and puissant Apollo."

For the first time George let himself go with Wandel.

"You'll find Apollo Nemesis, little man, unless you learn to say what you mean in words of one syllable."

And the discussion of the clubs went on, breeding enmities but determining no radical reform.

The struggle at Princeton was over. George looked often at the younger men, who didn't have to prepare themselves minutely for the greater struggle just ahead, envying them their careless play, their proneness to over-indulgence in beer and syncopated song. While he worked with high and low prices and variations in exchange he heard them calling cheerily across the campus, gathering parties for poker or bridge or a session at the Nassau. Goodhue, even Wandel, found some time for frivolity. George strangled his instinct to join them. He had too much to do. In every diversion he took he wanted to feel there was a phase personally valuable to him.

He counted the days between his glimpses of Sylvia, and tried not to measure the hours dividing his meetings with Betty. If only he dared let himself go, dared cease battle for a little, dared justify Sylvia's attitude! Even Goodhue noticed his avoidance of Betty.

He encountered Sylvia in New York; asked her to dance with him; was refused; cut in when she was, in a sense, helpless; and glided around the room with a sullen, brilliant body that fairly palpitated with distaste.

Even during the summer he ran into her once on

Long Island. Then he was always missing her. Perhaps she had learned to avoid him. He shrank each morning from his paper, from any bit of rumour connecting her with a man; and Blodgett, he noticed, was still making money for a bachelor bank account.

He came to conceive a liking for his flabby employer, although he was quite sure Blodgett wouldn't have bothered with him a moment if he hadn't been a prominent college man with such ties among the great as Blodgett hadn't been able to knot himself. What was more to the point, the stout man admired George's ambition. He was more generous with his surreptitious advice. He paid a larger salary which he admitted was less than George earned during that summer. George, therefore, went back to Princeton with fuller pockets. Again Mundy was loath to let him depart.

"You know more about this game than men who've worked at it for years."

His face of a parson grimaced.

"You'd soon be able to hire me, if you'd stick on the job instead of going back to college to get smashed up at football."

George, however, didn't suffer much damage that year. He played brilliantly through a season that without him would have been far more disastrous than it was.

When it was all over Squibs sat one night silently for a long time. At last he stirred, lighted his pipe, and spoke.

"I ought to say to you, George, that I was as satisfied with you in defeat as I was in victory."

"I outplayed Planter, anyway, didn't I?"

Bailly studied him.

"Did that mean more to you than having Princeton beaten?"

"It kept Princeton from being beaten worse than it was."

"Yes," Bailly admitted, "and, perhaps, you are right to find a personal victory somewhere in a general defeat."

"But you really think it selfish," George said.

"I wish," Bailly answered, "I could graft on your brain some of Allen's mental processes, even his dissatisfactions."

"You can't," George said, bluntly. "I'm tired of Allen's smash talk. Most people like him could be bought with the very conditions they attack."

Bailly arose and limped up and down. When he spoke his voice vibrated with an unaccustomed passion:

"I don't know. I don't think so. But I want you to realize that prostrate worship of the fat old god success is as wicked as any other idolatry. I want you to understand that Allen and his kind may be sincere and right, that a vision unblinded by the bull's-eye may see the target all awry. My fear goes back to your first days here. You are still ashamed of service."

"I've served," George said, hotly.

"Was it real service," Bailly asked gently, "or a shot at

the bull's-eye?"

Almost involuntarily George clapped his fingers to his head.

"You're wrong, sir," he cried. "I've served when nothing but the thought of service brought me through."

Mrs. Bailly hurried in. She put one hand on George's shoulder. With the other she patted his hair.

"What's he scolding my boy for?"

George grinned at Bailly.

"Don't you see, sir, if I were as bad as you think she couldn't do that?"

Bailly nodded thoughtfully.

"If you've served as you say you must be merely hiding the good."

XXX

To himself at times George acknowledged his badness, in Bailly's terms at least. He sometimes sympathized with Allen's point of view, even while he heckled that angular man who often sat with him and Goodhue, talking about strikes, and violence, and drunkenness as the quickest recreation for men who had no time for play. He longed to tell Allen in justification that he had walked out of the working class himself. Later, staring at Sylvia's portrait, he would grow hard again. Men, he would repeat, wanted to smash down obstacles only because they didn't have the strength to scramble over. He had the strength. But Bailly would intrude again. What about

the congenitally unsound?

"I'm not unsound," he would say to himself, studying the picture.

And he suspected that it was because he didn't want to be good that he was afraid of seeing too much of Betty Alston and her kindliness and the reminiscence of tears in her eyes. If Squibs only knew how blessedly easy it would be to turn good, to let ambition and Sylvia slip into a remote and ugly memory! More frequently now he stared at her portrait, forcing into his heart the thought of hatred and into her face the expression of it; for the more hatred there was between them, the smaller was the chance of his growing weak.

He longed for the approaching escape from his gravest temptation. When he was through college and definitely in New York he would find it simpler to be hard. For that matter, why should he grow weak? He had achieved a success far beyond the common. He would graduate president of his class, captain of the football team, although he had tried to throw both honours to Goodhue; member of the club that had drawn the best men of his year, a power in the Senior Council; the man who had done most for Princeton; a high-stand scholar; and, most important of all, one who had acquired with his education a certain amount of culture and an ease of manner in any company. Allen was still angular, as were most of those other men who had come here, like George, with nothing behind them.

In his success he saw no miracle, no luck beyond Squibs' early interest. What he had won he had applied himself to get with hardness, cold calculation, an indomitable will. He had kept his

eyes open. He had used everybody, everything, to help him climb toward Sylvia out of the valley of humiliation. The qualities that had brought him all that were good qualities, worth clinging to. As he had climbed he would continue in spite of Bailly or Allen or Betty. But when he thought of Betty he had to fight the tears from his own eyes.

A little while before his graduation he went to her, knowing he must do something to make her less kind, to destroy the impression she gave him of one who, like Mrs. Bailly, always thought of him at his best.

He walked alone through a bland moonlight scented with honeysuckle from the hedges. His heart beat as it had that day four years ago when he had unintentionally let Sylvia know his presumptuous craving.

Two white figures strolled in front of the house. He went up, striving to overcome the absurd reluctance in his heart. It wasn't simple to destroy a thing as beautiful as this friendship. Betty paused and turned, drawing her mother around.

"I thought you'd quite forgotten us, George."

Nor did he want to kill the welcome in her voice.

"You're leaving Princeton very soon," Mrs. Alston said. "I'm glad you've come. Of course, it isn't to say good-bye."

He wondered if she didn't long for a parting to be broken only by occasional meetings in town. He wondered if she didn't fear for Betty. If there had been no Sylvia, if he had dared abandon the hard things and ask for Betty, this imperious woman

would have put plenty of searching questions. But, he reflected, if it hadn't been for Sylvia he never would have come so far, never would have come to Betty. Every consideration held him on his course.

He feared that Mrs. Alston, in her narrow, careful manner, wouldn't give him an opportunity to speak to Betty alone. He was glad when they went in and found Mr. Alston, who liked and admired him. When he left there must come a chance. As he said good-night, indeed, Betty followed him to the hall, and he whispered, so that the servant couldn't hear:

"Betty, I've a confession. Won't you walk toward the gate with me?"

The colour entered her white face as she turned and called to her mother:

"I'll walk to the gate with George."

From the room he fancied a rustling, irritated acknowledgment.

But she came, throwing a transparent scarf over her tawny hair, and they were alone in the moonlight and the scent of flowers, walking side by side across grass, beneath the heavy branches of trees.

"See here, Betty! I've no business to call you that—never have had. Without saying anything I've lied to you ever since I've been in Princeton. I've taken advantage of your friendship."

She paused. The thick leaves let through sufficient light to show him the bewilderment in her eyes. Her voice was a little frightened.

"You can't make me believe that. You're not the sort of man that does such things. I don't know what

you're talking about."

"Thanks," he said, "but you're wrong, and I can't go away without telling you just what I am."

"You're just—George Morton," she said with a troubled smile.

He tried not to listen. He hurried on with this killing that appealed to him as necessary.

"Remember the day in Freshman year, or before, wasn't it, when you recognized Sylvia Planter's bulldog? It was her dog. She had given him away—to me, because she had set him on me, and instead of biting he had licked my face. So she said to take him away because she could never bear to see him again."

Betty's bewilderment grew. She spoke gropingly.

"I guessed there had been something unusual between you and the Planters. What difference does it make? Why do you tell me now? Anything as old as that makes no difference."

"But it does," he blurted out. "I know you too well now not to tell you."

"But you and Lambert are good friends. You dance with Sylvia."

"And she," he said with a harsh laugh, "still calls me an impertinent servant."

Betty started. She drew a little away.

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Just that," he said, softly.

He forced himself to a relentless description of his

father and mother, of the livery stable, of the failure, of his acceptance of the privilege to be a paid by the week guardian on a horse of the beautiful Sylvia Planter. The only point he left obscure was the sentimental basis of his quarrel with her.

"I *was* impertinent," he ended. "She called me an impertinent servant, a stable boy, other pleasant names. She had me fired, or would have, if I hadn't been going anyway. Now you know how I've lied to you and what I am!"

He waited, arms half raised, as one awaits an inevitable blow. For a minute she continued to stare. Then she stepped nearer. Although he had suffered to win an opposite response, she did what he had forced Lambert Planter to do.

"No wonder Lambert admires you," she said, warmly. "To do so much from such a beginning! I knew at first you were different from—from us. You're not now. It's——"

She broke off, drawing away a little again. He struggled to keep his hands from her white, slender figure, from her hair, yellow in the moonlight.

"You don't understand," he said, desperately. "This thing that you say I've become is only veneer. It may have thickened, but it's still veneer."

It hurt to say that more than anything else, for all along he had been afraid it was the truth.

"Underneath the veneer," he went on, "I'm the mucker, the stable boy if you like. If I were anything else I would have told you all this years ago. Betty! Betty!"

She drew farther away. He thought her voice was frightened, not quite clear.

"Please! Don't say anything more now. I'd rather not. I—I——Listen! What difference does it make to me or anybody where you came from? You're what you are, what you always have been since I've known you. It was brave to tell me. I know that. I'm going now. Please——"

She moved swiftly forward, stretching out her hand. He took it, felt its uncertain movement in his, wondered why it was so cold, tightened his grasp on its delightful and bewitching fragility. Her voice was uncertain, too. It caressed him as he unconsciously caressed her hand.

"Good-night, George."

He couldn't help holding that slender hand tighter. She swayed away, whispering breathlessly:

"Let me go now!"

He opened his fingers, and she ran lightly, with a broken laugh, across the lawn away from him.

The moonlight was like the half light of a breathless chapel, and the scent of flowers suggested death; yet he had not killed what he had come to kill.

When he couldn't see her white figure any more George Morton, greatest of football players, big man of his class, already with greedy fingers in the fat purse of Wall Street, flung himself on the thick grass and fought to keep his shoulders from jerking, his throat from choking, his eyes from filling with tears.

PART III

THE MARKET-PLACE

I

George left Princeton with a sense of flight. The reception of a diploma didn't interest him, nor did the cheers he received class day or on the afternoon of the Yale baseball game when, beneath a Japanese parasol, he led the seniors in front of admiring thousands who audibly identified him for each other.

The man that had done most for Princeton! He admitted he had done a good deal for himself. Of course, Squibs was right and he was abnormally selfish; only it was too bad Betty couldn't have thought so. He had tried to make her and had failed, he told himself, because Betty couldn't understand selfishness.

He avoided during those last days every chance of seeing her alone; but even in the presence of others he was aware of an alteration in her manner, to be traced, doubtless, to the night of his difficult confession. She was kinder, but her eyes were often puzzled, as if she couldn't understand why he didn't want to see her alone.

He counted the moments, anxious for Blodgett and the enveloping atmosphere of his marble-and-mahogany office. That would break the last permanent tie. He would return to Princeton, naturally, but for only a day or two now and then,

too short a time to permit its influences appreciably to swerve him.

Without meaning to, he let himself soften on the very edge of his departure when the class sang on the steps of Nassau Hall for the last time, then burned the benches about the cannon, and in lock step, hands on shoulders, shuffled slowly away like men who have accomplished the interment of their youth.

A lot of these mourning fellows he would never meet again; but he would see plenty of Goodhue and Wandel and other useful people. Why, then, did he abruptly and sharply regret his separation from all the others, even the submerged ones who had got from Princeton only an education taken like medicine and of about as much value? In the sway of this mood, induced by permanent farewells, he came upon Dalrymple.

"There's no point saying good-bye to you," George offered, kindly.

Of course not. They would meet each other in town too frequently, secreting a private enmity behind publicly worn masks of friendship. George was wandering on, but Dalrymple halted him. The man was a trifle drunk, and the sentiment of the moment had penetrated his narrow mind.

"Not been very good friends, George, you and I."

Even then George shrank from his apologies, since he appreciated their precise value.

"Why don't you forget it?" he asked, gruffly.

Dalrymple nodded, but George knew in the morning the other would regret having said as much as he

had.

Immediately after that sombre dissolution of the class George said good-bye to the Baillys. Although it was quite late they sat waiting for him in the study, neat and serene as it had been on that first day a hundred years ago. The room was quite the same except that Bill Gregory's picture had lost prominence while George's stood in the place of honour—an incentive for new men, although George was confident Squibs didn't urge certain of his qualities on his youngsters.

Squibs looked older to-night, nearly as old, George thought, as the disgraceful tweeds which he still wore. Mrs. Bailly sat in the shadows. George kissed her and sank on the sofa at her side. She put her hand out and groped for his, clinging to his fingers with a sort of despair. For a long time they sat without speaking. George put his arm around her and waited for one or the other to break this silence which became unbearable. He couldn't, because as he dreamed among the shadows there slipped into his mind the appearance and the atmosphere of another room where three had sat without words on the eve of a vital parting. Tawdry details came back of stove and littered table and ungainly chairs, and of swollen hands and swollen eyes. He had suffered an unbearable silence then because he had found himself suddenly incapable of speaking his companions' language. With these two the silence was more difficult, because there was too much to say—more than ever could be said.

He started. Suppose Squibs at the very last should use his father's parting words:

"It's a bad start, but maybe you'll turn out all right

after all."

His lips tightened. Would it be any truer now than it had been then? For that matter, would Squibs have cared for him or done as much for him, if he had been less ambitious, if he had compromised at all?

One thing was definite: No matter what he did these two would never demand his exile; and the old pain caught him, and he knew it was real, and not a specious cover for his relief at not having to see his parents again. It hurt—most of all his mother's acceptance of a judgment she should have fought with all her soul.

He stroked the soft hand that clung to his. From that parting he had come to the tender and eager maternal affection of this childless woman, and he knew she would always believe he was right.

But she wanted him to have Betty——

He stood up. He was going away from home. She expressed that at the door.

"This is your home, George."

Bailly nodded.

"Never forget that. Don't let your ideas smoulder in your own brain. Come home, and talk them over."

George kissed Mrs. Bailly. He put his hands on Bailly's narrow shoulders. He looked at the young eyes in a wrinkled face.

"The thing that hurts me most," he muttered, "is that I haven't paid you back."

"Perhaps not altogether," Bailly answered, gravely,

"but someday you may."

II

The last thing George did before leaving his dismantled room, which for so long had sheltered Sylvia's riding crop and her photograph, was to write this little note to Betty:

> DEAR BETTY:
>
> It's simpler to go without saying good-bye.
>
> G. M.

Then he was hustled through the window of the railroad train, out of Princeton, and definitely into the market-place.

After the sentiment of the final days the crowding, unyielding buildings, and the men that shared astonishingly their qualities, offered him a useful restorative. He found he could approximate their essential hardness again.

The Street at times resembled the campus—it held so many of the men he had learned to know at Princeton. Lambert was installed in his father's marble temple. He caught George one day on the sidewalk and hustled him to a luncheon club.

"I suppose I really ought to put you up here."

"Why?" George asked.

"Because I'm always sure of a good scrap with you. I missed not playing against you in the Princeton game last fall. Now there's no more football for either of

us. I like scraps."

Blodgett, he chanced to mention later, had spent the previous week-end at Oakmont. Blodgett had already bragged of that in George's presence. He forgot the excellent dishes Lambert had had placed before him.

"Have you put Blodgett up here, too?" he asked in his bluntest manner.

Lambert shook his head.

"That's different."

"Not very honestly different," George said, attempting a smile.

"You mean," Lambert laughed, "because I've never asked you to Oakmont? Under the circumstances ——"

"I don't mean that," George said. "I mean Blodgett."

"I can only arrange my own likes and dislikes," Lambert answered, still amused.

Then who at Oakmont liked the fat financier?

Rogers was in the street, too, selling bonds with his old attitude toward the serious side of life, striving earnestly only to spy out the right crowd and to run with it.

"Buy my bonds! Buy my bonds!" he would cry, coming into George's office. "They're each and every one a bargain. Remember, what's a bargain to-day may be a dead loss to-morrow, so buy before it's too late."

Goodhue planned to enter a stock exchange firm in the fall, and a lot of other men from the class would

come down then after a long rest between college and tackling the world on twenty dollars a month. Wandel alone of George's intimates rested irresolute. George, since he had taken two rooms and a bath in the apartment house in which Wandel lived, saw him frequently. He could easily afford that luxury, for each summer his balance had grown, and Blodgett, now that he had George for as long as he could keep him, was paying him handsomely, and flattering him by drawing on the store of special knowledge his extended and difficult application had hoarded.

To live in such a house, moreover, was necessary to his campaign, which, he admitted, had lagged alarmingly. Sylvia had continued to avoid him. She seemed to possess a special sense for the houses and the parties where he would be, and when, in spite of this, they did meet, she tried to impress him with a thorough indifference; or, if she couldn't avoid a dance, with a rigid repulsion that failed to harmonize with her warm colouring and her exquisite femininity.

Through some means he had to get on. His restless apprehension had grown. Her departure for Europe with her mother fed the rumours that from time to time had connected her name with eligible men. It was even hinted now that her mother's eyesight, which reached to social greatness across the Atlantic, was responsible for her celibacy.

"There'll be an announcement before she comes back," the gossip ran. "They'll land a museum piece of a title."

George didn't know about that, but he did realize that unless he could progress, one day a rumour would take body. He resented bitterly her absence

this summer, but if things would carry on until the fall he would manage, he promised himself, to get ahead with Sylvia.

Wandel seemed to enjoy having George near, for, irresolute as he was, he spent practically the entire summer in town. George, one night when they had returned from two hours' suffering of a summer show, asked him the reason. They smoked in Wandel's library.

"I can look around better here," was all Wandel would say.

"But Driggs! Those precious talents!"

Wandel stretched himself in an easy chair.

"What would you suggest, great man?"

George laughed.

"Do you write poetry in secret—the big, wicked, and suffering city, seen from a tenth-story window overlooking a pretty park?"

Vehemently Wandel shook his head.

"You know what most of our modern American jinglers are up to—talking socialism or anarchy to get themselves talked about. If only they wouldn't apply such insincere and half-digested theories to their art! It's a little like modern popular music—criminal intervals and measures against all the rules. But crime, you see, is invariably arresting. My apologies to the fox-trot geniuses. They pretend to be nothing more than clever mutilators; but the jinglers! They are great reformers. Bah! They remind me of a naughty child who proudly displays the picture he has torn into grotesque pieces, saying: 'Come quick,

mother, and see what smart little Aleck has done.' You'll have to try again, George."

George glanced up. His face was serious.

"Don't laugh at me. I mean it. Politics."

"At Princeton I wasn't bad at that," Wandel admitted, smiling reminiscently. "But politics mixes a man with an unlovely crowd—uncouth provincials, a lot of them, and some who are to all purposes foreigners. Do you know, my dear George, that ability to read and write is essential to occupying a seat in the United States Senate? I was amazed the other day to hear it was so. You see how simple it is to misjudge."

"Then there's room," George laughed, "for more honest, well-educated, well-bred Americans."

"Seems to me," Wandel drawled, "that a little broad-minded practicality in our politics would be more useful than bovine honesty. I could furnish that. How should I begin?"

"You might get a start in the State Department," George suggested, "diplomacy, a secretaryship——"

"For once you're wrong," Wandel objected. "In this country diplomacy is a destination rather than a route. The good jobs are frequently given for services rendered, or men pay enormous sums for the privilege of being taken for waiters at their own functions. To start at the bottom——Oh, no. I don't possess the cerebral vacuity, and you can only climb out of the service."

"Just the same," George laughed, "you'd make a tricky politician."

Wandel puffed thoughtfully.

"You're a far-seeing, a far-going person," he said. "You are bound to be a very rich man. You'll want a few practical politicians. Isn't it so? Never mind, but it's understood if I ever run for President or coroner you'll back me with your money bags."

George glanced about the room, as striking and costly in its French fashion as the green study had been.

"You have all the money you need," he said.

"But I'd be a rotten politician," Wandel answered, "if I spent any of my own money on my own campaigns. So we have an understanding if the occasion should arise——"

With a movement exceptionally quick for him, suggesting, indeed, an uncontrollable nervous reaction, Wandel sprang to his feet and went to the window where he leant out. George followed him, staring over the park's far-spread velvet, studded with the small but abundant yellow jewels of the lamps.

"What is it, little man? It's insufferable in town. Why don't you go play by the sea or in the hills?"

"Because," Wandel answered, softly, "I can't help the feeling that any occasion may arise. I don't mean our little politics, George. Time enough for them. I don't want to go. I am waiting."

George understood.

"You mean the murders at Sarajevo," he said. "You're over-sensitive. Run along and play. Nothing will come of that."

"Tell me," Wandel said, turning slowly, "that you

mean what you say. Tell me you haven't figured on it already."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"You're discreet. All right. I have figured, because, if anything should come of it, it offers the chance of a lifetime for making money. Mundy's put me in touch with some useful people in London and Paris. I want to be ready if things should break. I hope they won't. Honestly, I very much doubt if they will. Even Germany will think twice before forcing a general war."

"But you're making ready," Wandel whispered, "on the off-chance."

George pressed a switch and got more light. It was as if a heavy shadow had filled the delightful room.

"We're growing fanciful," he said, "seeing things in the dark. By the way, you run into Dalrymple occasionally? I'm told he comes often to town."

Wandel left the window, nodding.

"How long can he keep it up?" George asked.

"I'm not a physician."

"No, no. I mean financially. I gather his family live up to what they have."

"I daresay it would pain them to settle Dolly's debts frequently," Wandel smiled.

"Then," George said, slowly, "he is fairly sure to come to you—that is, if this keeps up."

"Why," Wandel asked, "should I encourage Dolly to be charitable to rich wine agents and under-dressed

females?"

George shook his head.

"If he asks you for help don't send him to the money lenders. Send him discreetly to me. If I didn't have what he'd want, I daresay I could get it."

Wandel stared, lighting another cigarette.

"I'd like to keep him from the money lenders," George said, easily.

He didn't care whether Wandel thought him a forgiving fool or a calculating scoundrel. Goodhue and Wandel had long since seen that he had been put up at a number of clubs. The two had fancied they could control Dalrymple's resentments. George, following his system, preferred a whip in his own hand. He harboured no thought of revenge, but he did want to be able to protect himself. He would use every possible means. This was one.

"We'll see," Wandel said. "It's too bad great men don't get along with little wasters."

III

More than once George was tempted to follow Sylvia, trusting to luck to find means of being near her. Such a trip might, indeed, lead to profit if the off chance should develop. Still that could be handled better from this side, and it was, after all, a chance. He must trust to her coming back as she had gone. His place for the present was with Blodgett and Mundy.

The chance, however, was at the back of his head when he encountered Allen late one hot night in a

characteristic pose in Times Square. Allen still talked, but his audience of interested or tolerant college men had been replaced by hungry, ragged loafers and a few flushed, well-dressed males of the type that prefers any diversion to a sane return home. Allen stood in the centre of this group. His arms gestured broadly. His angular face was passionate. From the few words George caught his sympathy for these failures was beyond measure. He suggested to them the beauties of violence, the brilliancies of the social revolution. The loafers commented. The triflers laughed. Policemen edged near.

"Free liquor!" a voice shrilled.

Allen shook his fist, and continued. The proletariat would have to take matters into its own hands.

"Fine!" a hoarse and beery listener shouted, "but what'll the cops say about it?"

The edging policemen didn't bother to say anything at first. They quietly scattered the scarecrows and the laggards. They indicated the advisability of retreat for the orator. Then one burst out at Allen.

"God help the proletariat if I have to take it before McGloyne at the station house."

And George heard another sneer:

"Social revolution! They've been trying to throw Tammany out ever since I can remember."

George got Allen away. The angular man was glad to see him.

"You look overworked," George said. "Come have a modest supper with me."

Allen was hungry, but he managed to grumble discouragement over his food.

"They laugh. They'll stop listening for the price of a glass of beer."

"Maybe," George said, kindly, "they realize it's no good trying to help them."

"They've got to be helped," Allen muttered.

"Then," George suggested, "put them in institutions, but don't expect me nor any one else to approve when you urge them to grab the leadership of the world. You must have enough sense to see it would mean ruin. I know they're not all like this lot, but they're all a little wrong or they wouldn't need help."

"It's because they've never had a chance," Allen protested.

It came to George that Allen had never had a chance either, and he wondered if he, too, could be led aside by the price of a glass of beer.

"You all want what the other fellow's got," he said. "From that one motive these social movements draw the bulk of their force. A lot for nothing is a perfect poor man's creed."

"You're a heathen, Morton."

"That is, a human being," George said, good naturedly. "You're another, Allen, but you won't acknowledge it."

Because he believed that, George took the other's address. Allen was loyal, aggressive, and extraordinarily bright, as he had proved at Princeton. It might be convenient to help him. Besides, he hated

to see a man he knew so well waste his time and look like a fool.

IV

By late July the off chance had pretty thoroughly defined itself except to the blind. Blodgett, however, was still skeptical. He thought George's plans were sound, provided a war should come. But there wouldn't be any war. His correspondents were optimistic.

"Have I your permission to use Mundy in his off time?" George asked.

"As far as I'm concerned," Blodgett said, "Mundy can play parchesi in his off time."

George telephoned Lambert Planter and sent a telegram to Goodhue. He took them to luncheon and had Mundy there, too. He outlined his plans for the formation of the firm of Morton, Planter, and Goodhue.

"He's called the turn of the cards," Mundy offered.

Such cards as he possessed George placed on the table. He furnished the idea, and the preliminary organization, and what money he had. He took, therefore, the major share of the profits. The others would give what time to the business they could, but it was their money he wanted, and the credit their names would give the firm. Mundy and he had made lists of buyers and sellers. No man in the Street was better equipped than Mundy to pick such a force. If Lambert and Goodhue agreed, these men could be collected within a week. Some would go to Europe. Others would scatter over the United States. It would cost a lot, but it meant an immeasurable amount in return, for the war was inevitable.

Goodhue and Lambert were as skeptical as Blodgett, but they agreed to give him what he needed to get his organization started. By that time, he promised them, they would see how right he was, and then he could use more of their money.

"It's the nearest I've ever come to gambling," he thought as he left them. "Gambling on a war!"

Because of his confidence, before a frontier had been crossed he had bought or contracted for large quantities of shoes and cloths and waterproofing. He had taken options on stock in small and wavering automobile concerns, and outlying machine shops and foundries, some of them already closed down, some struggling along without hope.

"If the war lasts a month," he told his partners, "those stocks will come from the bottom of nothing to the sky."

Goodhue became thoroughly interested at last. He cancelled his vacation and installed himself in the offices George had rented in Blodgett's building. With the men Mundy had picked, and under Mundy's tutelage, he took charge of the routine. George went to Blodgett the first of August.

"I want to quit," he said. "I've got a big thing. I want to give it all my time."

Blodgett mopped his face. His grin was a little sheepish.

"I want to invest some money in your firm," he jerked out.

"I can use it," George said.

"You've got Goodhue there," Blodgett went on in a

complaining way, "and Mundy's working nights for you. Don't desert an old man without notice. I'll give you plenty of time upstairs. Other things may come off here. I can use you."

"If you want to pay me when you know my chief interest is somewhere else," George said, "it's up to you."

"When I think I'm getting stung I'll let you know," Blodgett roared.

George sent for Allen, and urged him to go to London to open an office with an expert Lambert had got from his father's marble temple. Allen would be a check on the more experienced men whose scruples might not stand the temptations of this vast opportunity. Allen said he couldn't do it; couldn't abandon the work he had already commenced.

"There'll be precious little talk of socialism," George said, "until this thing is over. It's a great chance for a man to study close up the biggest change the world has ever undergone. Those fellows will want everything, and I'll give them everything I can lay my hands on. I'm ahead of a lot of jobbers here. I'll pay you well to see I don't get robbed on that side. Come on. Take a shot at hard facts for a change."

Allen gasped at the salary George mentioned. He hesitated. He went. George was glad to have helped him. He experienced also an ugly sense of triumph. He felt that he wanted to tell Squibs Bailly right away.

Sylvia and her mother, he heard later, had come home out of the turmoil, unacquainted with the discomforts of people who had travelled without the

Planter prestige. Whether the war was to blame or not, she had returned without a single rumour touching fact. He didn't see her right away, because she clung to Oakmont. More and more, as his success multiplied, keeping pace with the agony in Europe, he longed to see her. All at once a return to Oakmont was, in a sense, forced upon him, but he went without any thought of encountering Sylvia, hoping, indeed, to avoid her.

It was like his mother to express her letter with telegraphic bluntness without, however, going to the expense of actually wiring. Where he had expected her customary stiff gratitude for money sent he found a scrawled announcement of his father's death, and her plans for the funeral the following afternoon.

"Of course you won't come," she ended.

Yet it seemed to him that he should go, to arrange her future. This was the moment to snap the last enslaving tie between the Mortons and Oakmont. There was, of course, the chance of running into Sylvia, or some visitor who might connect him with the little house. Suppose Dalrymple, for example, should be staying with the Planters as he often did? George shrugged his shoulders. Things were coming rather rapidly to him. Besides, it was extremely unlikely that any one from the great house would see the Morton ceremony. The instincts of those people would be to avoid such sights.

V

About his return there was a compelling thrill. He drove from the station in one of the cheap automobiles that had made his father practically a

pensioner of the Planters. With an incredulous appreciation that he had once accepted its horizon as the boundary of his life, he examined the familiar landscape and the scar made upon it by the village. Curtly he refused to satisfy the driver's curiosity. He had some business at the little house on the Planter estate.

There, through the nearly stripped trees, it showed, almost audibly confessing its debt to the Planter carpenters, painters, and gardeners. In a clouded light late fall flowers waved from masses of dead leaves. Their gay colours gave them an appearance melancholy and apprehensive.

Here he was back at last, and he wasn't going in at the great gate.

He walked around the shuttered house and crossed the porch where his father had liked to sit on warm evenings. He rapped at the door. Feet shuffled inside. The door swayed open, and his mother stood on the threshold. Most of the changes had come to him, but in her red eyes sparkled a momentary and mournful importance. At first she didn't recognize her son.

"What is it?"

George stooped and kissed her cheek.

"I'm sorry, Mother."

Instead of holding out her arms she drew away, staring with fascination, a species of terror, at his straight figure, at his clothing, at his face that wouldn't coarsen now. When she spoke her voice suggested a placating of this stranger who was her son.

"I didn't think you'd come. I can't believe you're George—my Georgie."

Over her shoulders in the shadowed house he saw the inquisitive faces of women. It was clear that for them such an arrival was more divertive than the sharing of a sorrow that scarcely touched their hearts.

George went in. He remembered most of the faces that disclosed excitement while fawning upon his prosperity. He received an unpleasant impression that these poor and ignorant people concealed a dangerous envy, that they would be glad to grasp in one moment, even of violence, all that it had taken him years of difficult struggle to acquire. Whether that was so or not they ought not to stand before him as if his success were a crown. He tried to keep contempt from his voice.

"Please sit down. I want to talk to my mother. Where ——"

With slow steps she crossed the kitchen and opened the door of the parlour, beckoning. He followed, knowing what he would find in that uncomfortable, gala room of the poor.

He closed the door. In the half light he saw standing on trestles an oblong box altogether too large for the walls that seemed to crowd it. He had no feeling that anything of his father was there. He realized with a sense of helpless regret that all that remained to him of that unhappy man were the ghosts of such emotions as avarice, fear, and the instinct to sacrifice one's own flesh and blood for a competence.

"Why don't you look at him, George?"

"I don't think he'd care to have me looking at him now."

She wiped her eyes.

"You are too bitter against your father. After all, he was a good man."

"Why should death," he asked her, musingly, "make people seem better than they were in life? It isn't so."

"That's wicked. If your father could rise——"

His attention was caught by an air of pointing the oblong box had, as if to something infinitely farther than ambition and success, yet so close it angered him he couldn't see or touch it. His father had gone there, beyond the farthest horizon of all. Old Planter couldn't make trouble for him now. He was quite safe.

Over in Europe, he reflected, they didn't have enough coffins.

The oblong box for the first time made him think of that war, that was making him rich, in terms of life instead of dollars and cents. He felt dissatisfied.

"There should be more light here," he said, defensively.

But his mother shook her head.

He arranged a chair for her and sat near by while they discussed the details of her departure. She let him see that she shrank from leaving the house, against which, nevertheless, she had bitterly complained ever since Old Planter had got it. Evidently she wanted to linger in her familiar rut, awaiting with the attitude of a martyr whatever fate

might offer. That was the reason people had to be helped, because they preferred vicious inertia to the efforts and risks of change. Then why did they want the prizes of those who had had the courage to go forth and fight? Why couldn't Squibs see that?

Patiently George told her she needn't worry about money again. She had a sister who years ago had married and moved West to a farm that was not particularly flourishing. Undoubtedly her sister would be glad to have her and her generous allowance. So his will overcame his mother's reluctance to help herself. She glanced up.

"Who is that?"

He listened. The women in the kitchen were standing again. Light feet crossed the floor.

"Maybe somebody from the big house," his mother whispered. "They sent Simpson last night."

For a moment the entire building was as silent as the oblong box. Then the door opened.

Sylvia Planter slipped in and closed the door.

George caught his breath, studying her as she hesitated, accustoming herself to the insufficient light. She wore a broad-brimmed hat that gave her the charm and the grace of a portrait by Gainsborough. When she recognized him, indeed, she seemed as permanently caught as a portrait.

"Miss Sylvia!" his mother worshipped.

"They told me I would find you here," Sylvia said, uncertainly. "I didn't know——"

She broke off, biting her lip. George strolled around

the oblong box to the window, turning there with a slow bow. Even across that desolate, dead shell, the obstinate distaste and the challenge were lively in her glance.

"It was very kind of you to come," he said.

But he was sorry she had come. To see him in such surroundings was a stimulation of the ugly memories he had struggled to destroy. He read her instinct to hurt him now as she had hurt the impertinent man, Morton, who had lived in this house.

"When one of our people is in trouble——" she began, deliberately. "I thought I might be of some help to your mother."

Even over the feeling of security George had just tried to give her the old menace reached the uneasy woman.

"You—you remember him, Miss Sylvia?"

"Very well," Sylvia answered. "He used to be my groom."

"The title comes from you," George said, dryly.

His mother's glance fluttered from one to the other. What did she expect—Old Planter stalking in to carry out his threats?

"After all these years I scarcely knew him myself."

Sylvia's colour heightened. He appraised her rising temper.

"Bad servants," he said, "linger in good employers' memories."

"I know, Miss Sylvia," his mother burst out, "that he

wasn't to come back here, but——"

She unclasped her nervous hands. One indicated the silent cause of his disobedience. George moved toward the door. Sylvia stepped quickly aside. He felt, like a physical wave, her desire to hurt.

"At such a time," she said, "it's natural he should come back to his home. I think my father would be glad to have him with his mother."

George shrugged his shoulders, slipped out, navigated the shoals of whispering women, and reached the clean air. He buttoned his overcoat and shuffled through the dead leaves beneath the trees until he found himself at the spot where Lambert and he had fought. He recalled his hot boasts of that day. Fulfilment had seemed simple enough then. The scene just submitted reminded him how short a distance he had actually travelled.

He knew she would pass that way on her return to the big house, so he waited, and when he heard her feet disturbing the dead leaves he didn't turn. She came closer than he had expected, and he heard her contralto voice, quick and defiant:

"I hadn't expected to see you. I didn't quite realize what I was saying. I should have had more respect for any one's grief."

Having said that, she was going on, but he turned and stopped her. As he looked at her he reflected that everything had altered since that day—she most of all. Then the woman had been a little visible in the child. Now, he fancied, the child survived in the woman only through the persistence of this old quarrel. He stared at her lips, recalling his boast that

no man should touch them unless it were George Morton. He was no nearer them than he had been that day. Unless he got nearer some man would. It was incredible that she hadn't married. She would marry.

"In the sense you mean, I have no grief," he said.

"Then I needn't have bothered. I once said you were a—a——"

"Something melodramatic. A beast, I think it was," he answered. "If you don't mind I'll walk on with you for a little way."

"No," she said.

"If you please."

"You've no perception," she cried, angrily.

"Don't you think it time," he suggested, "that you ceased treating me like a groom? It isn't very convincing to me. I doubt if it is to you. I fancy it's really only your pride. I don't see why you should have so much where I am concerned."

Her hand made a quick gesture of repulsion.

"You've not changed. You may walk on with me while I tell you this: If you were like the men I know and can be friends with you'd leave me alone. Will you stop this persecution? It comes down to that. Will you stop forcing me to dance with you, to listen to you?"

He smiled, shaking his head.

"I'll make you dance with me more than ever. I've seen very little of you lately. I hope this winter——"

She stopped, facing him, her cheeks flaming.

"You see! You remind me every time I meet you of just what you are, just what you came from, just what you said and did that day."

"That is my aim," he smiled.

He moved his hand in the direction of the little house.

"When we're all like that will it make much difference who our fathers and mothers were?"

She shivered. She started swiftly away.

"Miss Planter!"

The unexpectedness of the naked command may have brought her around. He walked to her.

"When will you realize," he asked, "that it is unforgivable to turn your back on life?"

Had he really meant to suggest that she could possess life only through him? Doubtless the sublime effrontery of that interpretation reached her. She commenced to laugh, her colour rising. She glanced away, and her laughter died.

"You may as well understand," he said, "that I am never going to leave you alone."

She started across the leaf-strewn grass. He kept pace with her.

"Are you going to force me to make a scene?" she asked.

"Except with your father," he said, "I don't think it would make much difference."

He felt that if she had had anything in her hands then she would have struck at him.

"It's not because I'm a beast," he said, quietly, "that I have no grief for my father. He was through. Life had nothing to offer him. He had nothing to offer life. Don't think I'm incapable of grief. I experienced it the day I thought you might be dead. That was because you had so much to offer life—rather more than life had to offer you."

He saw her shrink from him but she walked on, repressing her pain and her anger.

"Since I've known intimately girls of your class," he said, "I've realized that not all of them would have turned and tried to wound as you did that day. Some would have laughed. Some would have been sorry and sympathetic. I don't think many would have made such a scene."

He smiled down at her.

"I want you to realize it is your own fault. You started this. I'm not scolding. I'm glad you were such a little fury. Otherwise, I might have gone on working for your father or for somebody else's father. But you're to blame for my persistence, so learn to put up with it. As long as I keep the riding crop with which you tried to cut my face I'll remember what I said I'd do, and I'll do it."

She didn't answer, but if she tried to give him the impression she wasn't listening she failed utterly.

Around a curve in the path came a bent, white old man, bundled in a heavy muffler and coat. In one hand he carried a thick cane. The other rested on the arm of a young fellow of the private secretary stamp.

There, George acknowledged, advanced the single person with whom a scene might make a serious difference, yet a more compelling thought crept in and overcame his sense of danger. That was the type of man who made wars. That man, indeed, was helping to finance this war. George was obsessed by the dun day: by the leaves, fallen and rotten; by the memory of the oblong box. Everything reminded him that not far away Death marched with a bland, black triumph, greeting science as an ally instead of an enemy.

"Suppose," he mused, "America should get in this thing."

At last she spoke.

"What did you say? Do you see my father?"

He nodded.

"Wouldn't it be wiser," she asked, "to leave me alone?"

"Your father," he said, "looks a good deal older."

Old Planter had, in fact, gone down hill since George's last glimpse of him in New York, or else he didn't attempt here to assume a strength he no longer possessed. He was quite close before he gave any sign of seeing the pair, and then he muttered to his secretary who answered with a whisper. He limped up and took Sylvia's hand.

"Where has my little girl been?"

She laughed harshly.

"To a rendezvous in the forest. You shouldn't let me go out alone."

Planter glanced from clouded eyes at George. His lips between the white hair smiled amiably.

"I don't believe I remember——"

"It's one of Lambert's business friends," Sylvia said, hastily. "Mr. Morton."

The old man shifted his cane and held out his hand.

"Lambert," he joked, "says he's going to make more money through you than I can hope to leave him. You seem to have got the jump on a lot of shrewd men. I'll see you at dinner? Lambert isn't coming to-night?"

George briefly clasped the hand of the big man.

"I must go back to town this afternoon."

"Then another time."

Planter shifted his cane and leant again on his secretary.

"Let's get on, Straker. Doctor's orders."

"Why," George asked when Sylvia and he were alone, "didn't you spring at the chance?"

"I prefer to fight my own battles," she said, shortly.

"Don't you mean," he asked, quizzically, "that you're a little ashamed of what you did that day?"

She shook her head.

"I was a frightened child. I have changed."

"Isn't it," he laughed, "a little because I, too, have changed? It never occurred to your father to connect me with the Mortons living on his place."

Again she shook her head, turning away. He held out his hand.

"I must go back. Let's admit we've both changed. Let us be friends."

She didn't answer. She made no motion to take his hand.

"One of the promises I made that day," he reminded her, "was to teach you not to be afraid of my touch."

"Does it amuse you to threaten me?" she asked.

Suddenly he reached out, caught her right hand before she could avoid him, and gave it a quick pressure.

"Of course you're right," he laughed. "Actions are more useful than threats."

While she stared, flushed and incredulous, at the hand he had pressed, George walked swiftly away, tingling with life, back to the house of death.

VI

At the funeral he submitted to the amazed scrutiny of the country people. They couldn't hurt him, because they impinged not at all on his world; but he was relieved when the oblong box had been consigned to the place reserved for it, and he could, after arranging the last details of his mother's departure, take the train back to New York.

Blodgett didn't even bother to ask where he had been. He was content these days to let George go his own way. He hadn't forgotten that the younger man had seen farther off than he the greatest opportunity

for money making the world had ever offered the greedy. He personally was more interested in the syndicating of foreign external loans. The Planters weren't far from the head of that movement, and George rather resented his stout employer's working hand in hand with the Planters. George longed to ask him how often he was trying to appear graceful at Oakmont these days.

The firm of Morton, Planter, and Goodhue had grown so rapidly that it took practically all of George's and Lambert's time. Mundy, to whom George had given a small interest, asked Blodgett if he couldn't leave to devote himself entirely to the offices upstairs.

"Go to it," Blodgett agreed, good naturedly. "Draw your profits and your salary from Morton after this."

George mulled over the sacrifice. Did it mean that Blodgett was so close to the Planters that a merger was possible?

"There's no use," he told Blodgett. "I'm earning practically nothing in your office, because I'm never here. I want to resign."

"Run along, sonny," Blodgett said. "Your salary is a small portion of the profits your infant firm is bringing me. I like you around the office once a day. Old Planter hasn't fired his boy, has he, and he's upstairs all the time, and he's taken over some of the old man's best clerks."

"He's Mr. Planter's son," George reminded him.

"And ain't you like a good son to me," the other leered, "making money for papa Blodgett?"

"Why did you let Mundy go so peacefully?" George asked, suspiciously.

"Because," Blodgett said, "he's been here a good many years, and he can make more money this way. Didn't want to stand in his light, and I had somebody in view."

But George wouldn't credit Blodgett with such altruism. Why was the man so infernally good natured, exuding an oily content? Goodhue hinted at a reason one day when they were talking of Sinclair and his lack of interest in the office.

"I've heard rather privately," Goodhue said, "that Sinclair got pretty badly involved a few months ago. If it hadn't been for Blodgett he'd have gone on the rocks a total wreck. Josiah puffed up and towed him away whole. Naturally Sinclair and his lady are grateful. I daresay this winter Blodgett's receiving invitations he's coveted, and if he gives any parties himself he'll have some of the people he's always wanted."

George hid his disapproval. Blodgett didn't even have a veneer. Money was all he could offer. And was Sinclair a great fool, or Blodgett the cleverest man in Wall Street, that Sinclair didn't know who had involved him and why?

As a matter of fact, Blodgett did appear at several dances, wobbling about the room to the discomfort of slender young things, getting generally in everyone's way. George hated to see him attempting to dance with Sylvia Planter. Sylvia seemed rather less successful in avoiding him than she did in keeping out of George's way. Until Blodgett's extraordinary week-end in February, indeed, George

didn't have another chance to speak to her alone.

"Of course you'll come, George," Blodgett said. "If this weather holds there'll be skating and sleighing—horses always, if you want 'em; and a lot of first-class people."

"Who?" George asked.

"How about another financial chick—one of your partners?"

"Lambert Planter?"

The puffy face expanded.

"And the Sinclairs, because I'm a bachelor, and——"

But, since he could guess Sylvia would be there, George didn't care for any more names. He wondered why Lambert or his sister should go. Had her attitude toward the fat, coarse man conceivably altered because of his gambolling at Oakmont? While he talked business with Mundy, Lambert, and Goodhue, George's mind was distracted by a sense of imponderable loss. Was it the shadow of what Sylvia had lost by accepting such an invitation?

He didn't go until Saturday afternoon—there was too much to occupy him at the office. This making money out of Europe's need had a good deal constricted his social wanderings. It was why he hadn't frequently seen Dalrymple close enough for annoyance; why he had met Betty only briefly a very few times. He hadn't expected to run into either of them at Blodgett's, but both were there. Betty was probably Lambert's excuse for rushing out the night before.

George felt sorry for Mrs. Sinclair. Still against the

corpulent crudities of her host she could weigh the graces of his guests. It pleased George that her greeting for him should be so warm.

The weather, too, had been considerate of Blodgett, refraining from injuring his snow or ice. A musical and brassy sleigh met George at the station. Patches of frosty white softened the lines of the house and draped the self-conscious nudity of the sculpture in the sunken garden.

"And it'll snow again to-night, sir," the driver promised, as if even the stables pulled for the master's success.

Everyone was out, but it was still early, so George asked for a horse and hurried into his riding clothes. He had been working rather too hard recently. The horse a groom brought around was a good one, and by no means overworked. George was as eager as the animal to limber up and go. Off they dashed at last along a winding bridle-path, broken just enough to give good footing. The war, and his share of helping the allies—at a price; his uncomfortable fear that the Baillys didn't like him to draw success from such a disaster; his disapproval of Sylvia's coming here—all cleared from his head as he galloped or trotted through the sharp air.

One thing: Blodgett hadn't spoiled these woodland bridle-paths; yet George had a sensation of always looking ahead for a nude marble figure at a corner, or an urn elaborately designed for simple flowers, or some iron animals to remind a hunter that Blodgett knew what a well-bred forest was for. Instead he saw through the trees ice swept clear of snow across which figures glided with joyful sounds.

"Some of his flashy guests," George thought.

He rode slowly to the margin of the pond, which shared the colour of the sky. Several of the skaters cried greetings. He recognized Dalrymple then, skating with a girl. Dalrymple veered away, waving a careless hand, Lambert came on, fingers locked with Betty's, and scraped to a halt at the pond's edge.

"So the war's stopped for the week-end at last?" Lambert called.

"I wondered if you'd come at all," Betty cried.

George dismounted, smothering his surprise.

"A men and youths' general furnisher," he said, "has to stick pretty much to the store. I never dreamed of seeing you here, Betty."

Perhaps Lambert caught George's real meaning.

"She's staying with Sylvia," he explained, "so, of course, she came."

George mounted and rode on, his mood suddenly as sunless as the declining afternoon. Those two still got along well enough. Certainly it was time for a rumour to take shape there. He had a sharp appreciation of having once been younger. Suppose, because of his ambition, he should see all his friends mate, leaving him as rich as Blodgett, and, like him, unpaired? He quickened the pace of his horse. It was inconceivable. No matter what Sylvia did he would never slacken his pursuit. In every other direction he had forged ahead. Eventually he would in that one. Then why did it hurt him to picture Betty gone beyond his reach?

He crossed the Blodgett boundaries, and entered a

country road as undisturbed and enticing as the private bridle-paths had been. He took crossroads at random, keeping only a sense of direction, trying to understand why he was sorry he had to be with Betty when he had come only to be near Sylvia.

The thickening dusk warned him, and he chose a road leading toward Blodgett's. First he received the horseman's sense of something ahead of him. Then he heard the muffled tread of horses in the snow, and occasionally a laugh.

"More of Josiah's notables," he hazarded.

He put spurs to his horse, and in a few minutes saw against the snow three dark figures ambling along at an easy trot. When he had come closer he knew that two of the riders were men, the other a woman. It was easy enough to identify Blodgett. A barrel might have ridden so if it had had legs with which to balance itself; and that slender figure was probably the trapped Sinclair. George hurried on, his premonition assuming ugly lines of reality. Even at that distance and from the rear he guessed that the graceful woman riding between the two men was Sylvia. Why had she chosen an outing with the ridiculous Blodgett? Sinclair, no man possessed sufficient charm to offset the disadvantages of such a companionship.

George, when he was sure, reined in, surprised at his reflections. Blodgett, heaven knew, had been good to him, and he had once liked the man. Why, then, had he turned so viciously against him? Adjectives his mind had recently applied to Blodgett flashed back: "Coarse," "fat," "ridiculous." Was it just? Why did he do it in spite of himself?

Sinclair turned and saw him. The party reined in, Sylvia, as one would have expected, impatiently in advance of the others. Her nod and something she said were lost in the men's cheery greetings. Since she was in advance, and edging on, as if to get farther away from him, George's opportunity was plain. The road wasn't wide enough for four abreast. If he could move forward with her Blodgett and Sinclair would have to ride together.

"Since I'm the last," he interrupted them, "mayn't I have first place?"

Quite as a matter of course he put his horse through and reined in at her side. They started forward.

"You ride as well as ever," he commented.

She shot a glance at him. Calmly he studied the striking details of her face. Each time he saw her she seemed more desirable. How was he to touch those lips that had filled his boy's heart with bursting thoughts? For the first time since that day they rode together, only now he was at her side, instead of heeling like a trained dog. In his man's fashion he was as well clothed as she. When they got back he would enter the great house with her instead of going to the stables. Whether she cared to acknowledge it or not he was of her kind—more so than the millionaire Blodgett ever could be. So he absorbed her beauty which fired his imagination. Such a repetition seemed ominous of a second climax in their relations.

Her quick glance, however, disclosed only resentment for his intrusion. He excused it.

"You see, I couldn't very well ride behind you."

She turned away.

"Hurry a little," Blodgett called.

It was what George wished, as she wished to crawl, never far in advance of the others.

"Come," he said, and flecked her horse with his crop.

"Don't do that again!"

He had gathered his own horse, and was galloping. Hers insisted on following. When George pulled in to keep at her side they were well in advance of the others. Now that he was alone with her he found it difficult to speak, and evidently she would limit his opportunity, for as he drew in she spurred her horse. He caught her, laughing.

"You may as well understand that I'll never ride behind you again."

She pressed her provocative lips together. So in silence, except for the crunching and scattering of the snow, they tore on through the dusk, rounding curves between hedges, rising to heights above bare, white stretches of landscape, dipping into hollows already won by the night. And each moment they came nearer the house.

In the night of the hollows he battled his desire to reach over and touch her, and cry out:

"Sylvia! You've got to understand!"

And in one such place her horse stumbled, and she pulled in and bent low over her saddle, and said, as if he had really spoken:

"I can't understand——"

Her outline was blurred, but her face was like a light in that shadowed valley. He didn't speak until they were up the hill and the wind had caught them.

"What?" he asked then.

Was it the glow, offered by the white earth rather than the sky, that made him fancy her lips quivered?

"Why you always try to hurt me."

He thought of her broken riding crop, of her attempts to hurt him every time he had seen her since the day she had tried to cut him with it. A single exception clung to his memory—the night of Betty's dance, years ago, when she had failed to remember him. Her words, therefore, carried a thrill, a colour of surrender, since from the very first she had made him attack for his own defence.

"That's an odd thing for you to say."

There were lights ahead, accents in the closing night for Blodgett's huge and ugly extravagance. They rode slowly up the drive.

"Will you ever stop following me? Will you ever leave me alone?"

He stared at her, answering softly:

"It is impossible I should ever leave you alone."

At the terrace he sprang down, tossed his reins to a groom, and went to her, raising his hands. For a moment she looked at him, hesitating. There were two grooms. So she took his hands and leapt down. It was a quick, uncertain touch her fingers gave him.

"Thanks," she said, and crossed the terrace at his

side.

That moment, he reflected, was in itself culminating, yet he couldn't dismiss the feeling that their relations approached a larger climax. All the better, since things couldn't very well go on as they were. Was it that fleeting contact that had altered him, or her companionship in the gray night? He only knew as he walked close to her that the bitterness in his heart had diminished. He was willing to relinquish the return blow if she would ease the hurt she had given him. He told himself that she had never been nearer. An odd fancy!

The others rode up as they reached the door, and the hall was noisy with people just returned from the pond, so that their solitude was destroyed. While he bathed and dressed he tried to understand just what had happened. The alteration in his own heart could only be accounted for by a change in hers. Perhaps his mood was determined by her unexpected wonder that he should always try to hurt. He couldn't drive from his mind the definite impression of her having come nearer.

"Winter sentiment!" he sneered, and hurried, for it was late.

VII

Lambert dropped in and lounged in a satin-covered chair while George wrestled with his tie. He gave Lambert the freshest news from the office, but his mind wasn't on business, nor, he guessed, was Lambert's.

"Blodgett does one rather well," Lambert said, glancing around the room.

George agreed.

"Only a marquise might feel more at ease in this room than a mere male."

He turned, smiling.

"I'm always afraid the furniture won't hold. Why should he have raised such a monster?"

"Maybe," Lambert offered, "to have it ready for a wife."

"Who would marry him?" George flashed.

"Nearly any girl," Lambert said. "So much money irons out a lot of fat. Then, when all's said and done, he's amusing and generous. He always tries to please. Why? What's made you scornful of Josiah?"

"There are some things," George said, "that one oughtn't to be able to buy with money."

Lambert arose, walked over to George, put his hands on his shoulders, and stared at him quizzically.

"You're a curious brute."

"I know what you mean," George said, "but let me remind you that money was just one of three things I started for."

Lambert's grasp tightened.

"And in a way you've got them all."

George shook off Lambert's grasp.

In a way!

"Let's go down."

In a way! It was rather cooling. It reminded him, too, that Squibs Bailly remained unpaid; and there was Sylvia, only a trifle nearer, and that, perhaps, in an eager imagination. Certainly he had forced some success, but would he actually ever complete anything? Would he ever be able to say I have acquired an exterior exactly as genuine as that one inherits, or I am a great millionaire, or I have proved myself worthy of all Squibs has given me, or I am Sylvia Planter's husband? Of course he had succeeded, but only in a way. Where was his will that he couldn't conquer altogether?

As he came down the stairs he saw Sylvia in a dazzling gown standing in front of the great fireplace surrounded by a group which included Dalrymple and Rogers who had managed an invitation and had just arrived with Wandel. Wandel brought excuses from Goodhue. It was like Goodhue, George thought, to avoid such a party.

Dalrymple smirked and chatted. George left Lambert and went straight to them. Sylvia could always be depended upon to be gracious to Dalrymple. She glanced at George and nodded. Although she continued to talk to Dalrymple she didn't turn away. George thought, indeed, that he detected a slight movement as if to make room for him. It was as if he had been any man of her acquaintance coming up. Then he had been right?

"Josiah said we'd have you," Dalrymple drawled. "Why didn't you skate? Anything to get on a horse, what? Freezing pleasure this weather."

George smiled at Sylvia.

"Not with the right horse and companionship."

Any one could see that Dalrymple had already swallowed an antidote for whatever benefit the day's fresh air and exercise had given him. Still in the weak face, across which the firelight played, George read other traits, settled, in a sense admirable; more precious than any inheritance a son could expect from a washerwoman mother and a labouring father. Then what was it Dalrymple had always coveted? What had made him rude to the poor men at Princeton? Something he hadn't had. Money. America, George reflected, could breed people like that. There was more than one way of being a snob. He wondered if Dalrymple would ever submerge his pride enough to come to him for money. He might go to Blodgett first, but George wasn't at all sure Blodgett would find it worth his while to buy up the young man.

Blodgett just then joined them. The white waistcoat encircling his rotund middle was like an advance agent, crying aloud: "The great Josiah is arriving just behind me."

"Everybody having a good time?" he bellowed.

Mrs. Sinclair, sitting near by, looked up, but her husband smiled indulgently. George watched Sylvia. Blodgett put the question to her.

"That was a fine ride, wasn't it? I'm always a little afraid for the horse I ride, though; might bend him in the middle."

George couldn't understand why she gave that friendly smile he coveted to Blodgett.

"I'd give a lot to ride like this young man," Blodgett went on, patting George's back. He preened himself.

"Still we can't all be born in the saddle."

The thing was so obvious George laughed outright. Even Sylvia conceded its ugly, unintentional humour. A smile drew at the corners of her mouth. If she could enjoy that she was, indeed, for the moment nearer.

Two servants glided around with trays.

Blodgett gulped the contents of his glass and smacked his lips.

"That fellow of mine," he boasted, "has his own blend. Not bad."

Sylvia drank hers with Dalrymple, while Betty over there shook her head. Probably it was his ungraceful inheritance that made George dislike a glass in Sylvia's fingers. Dalrymple slipped away.

"Dividends in the smoking-room!" Blodgett roared.

"Dalrymple's drawing dividends," George thought.

The procession for the dining-room formed and disbanded. Blodgett had Mrs. Sinclair and Sylvia at either hand. It was natural enough, but George resented the arrangement, particularly with Dalrymple next to Sylvia on the other side. Betty sat between Dalrymple and Lambert. George was nearly opposite, flanked by fluffy clothes and hair; and straightway each ear was choked with fluffy chatter —the theatre; the opera, from the side of sartorial criticism; the east coast of Florida—"but why should I go so far to see exciting bathing suits out of season and tea tables wabbling under palm trees?"—a scandal or two—that is such details as were permissible in his presence. He divided his ears

sufficiently to catch snatches from neighbouring sections of the table.

"Of course, we'll keep out of it."

It was Wandel, speaking encouragingly to a pretty girl. Out of what? Confound this chatter! Oh! The war, of course. It was the one remark of serious import that reached him throughout the dinner, and the country faced that possibility, and an increasing unrest of labour, and grave financial questions. The diners might have been people who had fled to a high mountain to escape an invasion, or happy ones who lived on a peak from which the menace was invisible. But it wasn't that. At other social levels, he knew, there was the same closing of the shutters, the same effort to create an enjoyable sunlight in a cloistered room. On the summit, he honestly believed, men did more and thought more. Perhaps where sensible men gathered together the curtains weren't drawn against grave fires in an abnormal night. Then it was the women. Did all men, like Wandel, choose to keep such things from the women? Did the women want them kept? Hang it! Then let them have the vote. Make them talk.

"You're really not going to Palm Beach, Mr. Morton?"

"I've too much to do."

"Men amuse me," the young lady fluffed. "They always talk about things to do. If one has a good time the things get done just the same."

God! What a point of view! Yet he wasn't one to pass judgment since he was more interested in the winning of Sylvia than he was in the winning of the war.

He watched her as he could, talking first to Blodgett then to Dalrymple. The brilliant Sylvia Planter had no business sitting between two such men. The fact that Blodgett had got the right people stared him in the face, but even so the man wasn't good enough to be Sylvia Planter's host. Nor did George like the way she sipped her wine. She seemed forcing herself to a travesty of enjoyment. Betty, on the other hand, drank nothing. He questioned if she was sorry Sylvia had brought her. She seemed glad enough, at least, to be with Lambert. He appeared to absorb her, and, in order to listen to him, she left Dalrymple nearly wholly to Sylvia. Once or twice she glanced across and smiled at George, but her kindliness had an air of coming from a widening distance. George was trapped—a restless giant tangled in a snarl of fluff.

He sighed his relief when the women had gone. He didn't remain long behind, wandering into the deserted hall where he stood frowning at the fire. He heard a reluctant step on the stairs and swung around. Sylvia walked slowly down, a cloak about her shoulders. In a sort of desperation he raised his hand.

"This party has got on my nerves."

He couldn't read the expression in her eyes.

"It's stifling in here," she said.

She walked the length of the hall, opened the door, and went through to the terrace.

George's heart quickened. She was out there alone. What had her eyes meant? He had never seen them just like that. They had seemed without challenge.

There was a coat closet at the rear of the hall. He ran

to it, got a cap and somebody's overcoat, and followed her out.

She sat on the railing, far from the house. The only light upon her was the nebulous reflection from the white earth. He hurried to her, his heart beating to the rhythm of nearer—nearer—nearer——

She stirred.

"As usual with you," she said, "I am unfortunate. I didn't think you would follow me. I came here because I wanted to be alone. I wanted to think. Can you appreciate that?"

He sat on the railing close to her.

"You never want me. I have to grasp what opportunities I can."

He waited for her to rise and wander away. He was prepared to urge her to remain. She didn't move.

"I can't always be running away from you," she said.

She stared straight ahead over the garden, nearly phosphorescent with its snow.

"Nearer, nearer, nearer," went through his head.

"It has been a long time since I've seen you," he said, "but even so I wish you hadn't come here."

"Why did you come?" she asked.

"Because I thought I should find you."

"Why did you think that?"

"I'd heard Blodgett had been a good deal at Oakmont. I guessed if Lambert came you would, too."

"It is impertinent you should interest yourself in my movements. Why—why do you do it?"

"Because everything you do absorbs me. Why else do you suppose I took the trouble at Betty's dance years ago to tell you who I was?"

She drew back without answering. Her movement caught his attention. The change in her manner, the white night, made him bold.

"I've often wondered," he said, "why you didn't remember me that day in Princeton, or that night. It hadn't been long. Don't you see it was an acknowledgment that I wasn't the old George Morton even then?"

"Oh, no," she answered with a little laugh, "because I remembered you perfectly well."

"Remembered me!" he cried. "And you danced with me, and said you didn't remember, and let me take you aside, and——"

He moved swiftly nearer until his face was close to hers, until he stared into her eyes that he could barely see.

"Why did you do that?"

She didn't answer.

"Why do you tell me now?" he urged with an increasing excitement.

Such a confession from her had the quality of a caress! He felt himself reaching up to touch the summit.

"Why? You've got to answer me."

She arose with easy grace and stood looking down at him.

"Because," she said, "I want you to stop being ridiculous and troublesome; and, really, the whole thing seems so unimportant now that I am going to be married."

He cried out. He sprang to his feet. He caught her hands, and crushed them as if he would make them a part of his own flesh so that she could never escape to accomplish that unbearable act.

"Sylvia! Sylvia!"

She fought, gasping:

"You hurt! I tell you you hurt! Let me go you—you ——Let me go——"

VIII

George stared at Sylvia as if she had been a child expressing some unreasonable and incredible intention. "What are you talking about? How can I let you go?"

Even in that light he became aware of the distortion of her face, of an unexpected moisture in her eyes; and he realized quite distinctly where he was, what had been said, just how completely her announcement for the moment had swept his mind clean of the restraints with which he had so painstakingly crowded it. Now he appreciated the power of his grasp, but he watched a little longer the struggles of her graceful body; for, after all, he had been right. How could he let her go to some man whose arms would furnish an inviolable sanctuary?

He shook his head. No such thing existed. Hadn't he, indeed, foreseen exactly this situation, and hadn't he told himself it couldn't close the approach to his pursuit? But he had never reconnoitred that road. Now he must find it no matter how forbidding the places it might thread. So he released her. She raised her hands to her face.

"You hurt!" she whispered. "Oh, how you hurt!"

"Please tell me who it is."

She turned, and, her hands still raised, started across the terrace. He followed.

"Tell me!"

She went on without answering. He watched her go, suppressing his angry instinct to grasp her again that he might force the name from her. He shrugged his shoulders. Since she had probably timed her attack on him with a general announcement, he would know soon enough. He could fancy those in the house already buzzing excitedly.

"I always said she'd marry so and so;" or, "She might have done better—or worse;" perhaps an acrid, "It's high time, I should think"—all the banal remarks people make at such crises. But what lingered in George's brain was his own determination.

"She shan't do it. Somehow I'll stop her."

He glanced over the garden, dully surprised that it should retain its former aspect while his own outlook had altered as chaotically as it had done that day long ago when he had blundered into telling her he loved her.

He turned and approached the house to seek this

knowledge absolutely vital to him but from which, nevertheless, he shrank. Two names slipped into his mind, two disagreeable figures of men she had recently chosen to be a good deal with.

George acknowledged freely enough now that he had taken his later view of his employer from an altitude of jealousy. Blodgett offered a possibility in some ways quite logical. With war finance he worked closer and closer to Old Planter. He had become a familiar figure at Oakmont. George had seen Sylvia choose his companionship that afternoon, had watched her a little while ago make him happy with her smiles; yet if she could tolerate Blodgett why had she never forgiven George his beginnings?

Dalrymple was a more likely and infinitely less palatable choice. He was good-looking, entirely of her kind, had been, after a fashion, raised at her side; and Sylvia's wealth would be agreeable to the Dalrymple bank account. George had had sufficient evidence that he wanted her—and her money. A large portion of the enmity between them, in fact, could be traced to the day he had found her portrait displayed on Dalrymple's desk. The only argument against Dalrymple was his weakness, and people smiled at that indulgently, ascribing it to youth—even Sylvia who couldn't possibly know how far it went.

Suspense was intolerable. He walked into the house and replaced the coat and cap in the closet. He commenced to look for Sylvia. No matter whose toes it affected he was going to have another talk with her if either of his hazards touched fact.

IX

He caught the rising and falling of a perpetual mixed conversation only partially smothered by a reckless assault on a piano. He traced the racket to the large drawing-room where groups had gathered in the corners as if in a hopeless attempt to escape the concert. Sylvia sat with none. One of the fluffy young ladies was proving the strength of the piano. Rogers was amorously attentive to her music. Lambert and Betty sat as far as possible from everyone else, heads rather close. Blodgett hopped heavily from group to group.

Over the frantic attempts of the young performer the human voice triumphed, but the impulse to this conversation was multiple. From no group did Sylvia's name slip, and George experienced a sharp wonder; so far, evidently, she had chosen to tell only him.

The young lady at the piano crashed to a brief vacation. The chatter, following a perfunctory applause, rose gratefully.

"Fine! Fine!" Blodgett roared. "Your next stop ought to be Carnegie Hall."

"She ought to play in a hall," someone murmured unkindly.

George retreated, relieved that Blodgett wasn't with Sylvia; and a little later he found Dalrymple in the smoking-room sipping whiskey-and-soda between erratic shots at billiards. Wandel was at the table most of the time, counting long strings with easy precision.

"What's up, great man?" he wanted to know.

Dalrymple, too, glanced curiously at George over his

glass. "Nothing exceptional that I know of," George snapped and left the room.

It added to his anger that his mind should let through its discontent. At least Sylvia wasn't with Blodgett or Dalrymple, and he tried to tell himself his jealousy was too hasty. All the eligible men weren't gathered in this house. He wandered from room to room, always seeking Sylvia. Where could she have gone?

He met guests fleeing from drawing-room to library, as if driven by the tangled furies of a Hungarian dance.

"Will that girl never stop playing?" he thought.

Betty came up to him.

"Talk to me, George."

He found himself reluctant, but two tables of bridge were forming, and Betty didn't care to play. Lambert did, and sat down. George followed Betty to a window seat, telling himself she wanted him only because Lambert was for the time, lost to her.

"Now," she said, directly, "what is it, George?"

"What's what?" he asked with an attempt at good-humour.

Her question had made him uneasy, since it suggested that she had observed the trouble he was endeavouring to bury. Would he never learn to repress as Goodhue did? But even Goodhue, he recalled, had failed to hide an acute suffering at a football game; and this game was infinitely bigger, and the point he had just lost vastly more important than a fumbled ball.

"You've changed," Betty was saying. "I'm a good judge, because I haven't really seen you for nearly a year. You've seemed—I scarcely know how to say it —unhappy?"

"Why not tired?" he suggested, listlessly. "You may not know it, but I've been pretty hard at work."

She nodded quickly.

"I've heard a good deal from Lambert what you are doing, and something from Squibs and Mrs. Squibs. You haven't seen much of them, either. Do you mind if I say I think it makes them uneasy?"

"Scold. I deserve it," he said. "But I've written."

"I don't mean to scold," she smiled. "I only want to find out what makes you discontented, maybe ask if it's worth while wearing yourself out to get rich."

"I don't know," he answered. "I think so."

It was his first doubt. He looked at her moodily.

"You're not one to draw the long bow, Betty. Honestly, aren't you a little cross with me on account of the Baillys?"

"Not even on my own account."

Her allusion was clear enough. George was glad Blodgett created a diversion just then, lumbering in and bellowing to Lambert for news of his sister. George listened breathlessly.

"Haven't seen her," Lambert said, and doubled a bid.

"Miss Alston?" Blodgett applied to Betty.

"Where should she be?" Betty answered.

"Got me puzzled," Blodgett muttered. "Responsibility. If anything happened!"

Betty laughed.

"What could happen to her here?"

George guessed then where Sylvia had gone, and he experienced a strong but temporal exaltation. Only a mental or a bodily hurt could have driven Sylvia to her room. He didn't believe in the first, but he could still feel the shape of her slender fingers crushed against his. The greater her pain, the greater her knowledge of his determination and desire.

"Guess I'll send Mrs. Sinclair upstairs," Blodgett said, gropingly.

He hurried out of the room. Betty rose.

"I suppose I ought to go."

"Nonsense," George objected. "She isn't the sort to come down ill all at once."

He followed Betty to the hall, however. Mrs. Sinclair was halfway up the stairs. Blodgett had gone on, always pandering, George reflected, to his guests.

"I'll wait here," Betty said to Mrs. Sinclair. "I mean, if anything should be wrong, if Sylvia should want me."

Mrs. Sinclair nodded, disappearing in the upper hall.

Finally George faced the moment he had avoided with a persistent longing. For the first time since the night of his confession he was quite alone with Betty. He tried not to picture her swaying away from him in a moonlight scented with flowers; but he couldn't help hearing her frightened voice: "Don't say

anything more now," and he experienced again her hand's delightful and bewitching fragility. Why had his confession startled? What had it portended for her?

He sighed. There was no point asking such questions, no reason for avoiding such dangerous moments now; too many factors had assumed new shapes. The long separation had certainly not been without its effect on Betty, and hadn't he recently seen her absorbed by Lambert? Hadn't she just now scolded him with a clear appreciation of his shortcomings? In the old days she had unconsciously offered him a pleasurable temptation, and he had been afraid of yielding to it because of its effect on his aim. Sylvia just now had tried to convince him that his aim was permanently turned aside. He knew with a hard strength of will that it wasn't. Nothing could tempt him from his path now—even Betty's kindness.

"Betty—have you heard anything of her getting married?"

She glanced at him, surprised.

"Who? Sylvia?"

He nodded.

"Only," she answered, "the rumours one always hears about a very popular girl. Why, George?"

"The rumours make one wonder. Nothing comes of them," he said, sorry he had spoken, seeking a safe withdrawal. "You know there's principally one about you. It persists."

There was a curious light in her eyes, reminiscent of something he had seen there the night of his

confession.

"You've just remarked," she laughed, softly, "that rumours seldom materialize."

What did she mean by that? Before he could go after an answer Mrs. Sinclair came down, joined them, and explained that Sylvia was tired and didn't want any one bothered. George's exaltation increased. He hoped he had hurt her, as he had always wanted to. Blodgett, accompanied by Wandel and Dalrymple, wandered from the smoking-room, seeking news. George felt every muscle tighten, for Blodgett, at sight of Mrs. Sinclair, roared:

"Where is Sylvia?"

The gross familiarity held him momentarily convinced, then he remembered that Blodgett was eager to make progress with such people, quick to snatch at every advantage. Sylvia wasn't here to rebuke him. Under the circumstances, the others couldn't very well. As a matter of fact, they appeared to notice nothing. Of course it wasn't Blodgett.

"In her room with a headache," Mrs. Sinclair answered. "She may come down later."

"Headaches," Wandel said, "cover a multitude of whims."

George didn't like his tone. Wandel always gave you the impression of a vision subtle and disconcerting.

Dalrymple, in spite of his confused state, was caught rattling off questions at Mrs. Sinclair, too full of concern, while George watched him, wondering—wondering.

"Must have her own way," Blodgett interrupted.

"Bridge! Let's cut in or make another table. George?"

George and Betty shook their heads, so Blodgett, with that air of a showman leading his spectators to some fresh surprise, hurried the others away. George didn't attempt to hide his distaste. He stared at the fire. Hang Blodgett and his familiarities!

"What are you thinking about, George?"

"Would you have come here, Betty, of your own wish?"

"Why not?"

"Blodgett."

"What about the old dear?"

George started, turned, and looked full at her. There was no question. She meant it, and earlier in the evening Lambert had said nearly any girl would marry Blodgett. What had become of his own judgment? He felt the necessity of defending it.

"He's too precious happy to have people like you in his house. You know perfectly well he hasn't always been able to do it."

"Isn't that why everyone likes him," she asked, "because he's so completely unaffected?"

George understood he was on thin ice. He didn't deviate.

"You mean he's all the more admirable because he hasn't plastered himself with veneer?"

Her white cheeks flushed. She was as nearly angry as he had ever seen her.

"I thought you'd never go back to that," she said. "Didn't I make it clear any mention of it in the first place was quite unnecessary?"

"I thought you had a reproof for me, Betty. You don't suppose I ever forget what I've had to do, what I still have to accomplish."

She half stretched out her hand.

"Why do you try to quarrel with me, George?"

"I wouldn't for the world," he denied, warmly.

"But you do. I told you once you were different. You shouldn't compare yourself with Mr. Blodgett or any one. What you set out for you always get."

He smiled a little. She was right, and he must never lose his sense of will, his confidence of success.

She started to speak, then hesitated. She wouldn't meet his glance.

"Why," she asked, "did you tell me that night?"

"Because," he answered, uncomfortably, "you were too good a friend to impose upon. I had to give you an opportunity to drive me away."

"I didn't take it," she said, quickly, "yet you went as thoroughly as if I had."

She spread her hands.

"You make me feel as if I'd done something awkward to you. It isn't fair."

Smiling wistfully, he touched her hand.

"Don't talk that way. Don't let us ever quarrel, Betty.

You've never meant anything but kindness to me. I'd like to feel there's always a little kindness for me in your heart."

Her long lashes lowered slowly over her eyes.

"There is. There always will be, George."

X

For some time after Betty had left him George remained staring at the fire. The chatter and the intermittent banging of the piano made him long for quiet; but it was good discipline to stay downstairs, and Mrs. Sinclair had said Sylvia might show herself later. So he waited, struggling with his old doubt, asking himself if he had actually acquired anything genuine except his money.

Later he wandered again from room to room, seeking Sylvia, but she didn't appear, and he couldn't understand her failure. Had it any meaning for him? Why, for that matter, should she strike him before any other knew of the weapon in her hand? From time to time Dalrymple expressed a maudlin concern for her, and George's uncertainty increased. If it should turn out to be Dalrymple, he told himself hotly, he would be capable of killing.

The young man quite fulfilled his promise of the early evening. Long after the last of the women had retired he remained in the smoking-room. Rogers abetted him, glad, doubtless, to be sportive in such distinguished company. Wandel loitered, too, and was unusually flushed, refilling his glass rather often. Lambert, Blodgett, and he were at a final game of billiards.

"You've been with Dalrymple all evening," George said, significantly, to Wandel.

"My dear George," Wandel answered, easily, "I observe the habits of my fellow creatures. Be they good or bad I venture not to interfere."

"An easy creed," George said. "You're not your brother's keeper."

"Rather not. The man that keeps himself makes the world better."

George had a disturbing fancy that Wandel accused him.

"You don't mean that at all," he said. "When will you learn to say what you mean?"

"Perhaps," Wandel replied, sipping, "when I decide not to enter politics."

"Your shot," Blodgett called, and Wandel strolled to the table.

Dalrymple didn't play, his accuracy having diminished to the point of laughter. He edged across to George.

"Old George Morton!" he drawled. "Young George Croesus! And all that."

The slurred last phrase was as abhorrent as "why don't you stick to your laundry?" It carried much the same implication. But Dalrymple was up to something, wanted something. He came to it after a time with the air of one conferring a regal favour.

"Haven't got a hundred in your pocket, Croesus? Driggs and bridge have squeezed me dry. Blodgett's

got bones. Never saw such a man. Has everything. Driggs is running out. Recoup at bones. Everybody shoot. Got the change, save me running upstairs? Bad for my heart, and all that."

He grinned. George grinned back. It was a small favour, but it was a start, for the other acquired bad habits readily. Ammunition against Dalrymple! He had always needed it, might want it more than ever now. At last Dalrymple himself put it in his hand.

He passed over the money, observing that the other moved so as to screen the transaction from those about the table.

"Little night-cap with me?" Dalrymple suggested as if by way of payment.

George laughed.

"Haven't you already protected the heads of the party?"

Dalrymple made a wry face.

"Do their heads a lot more good than mine."

The game ended.

Dalrymple turned away shouting.

"Bones! Bones!"

Blodgett produced a pair of dice with his air of giving each of his patrons his heart's desire. Wandel yawned. Dalrymple rattled the dice and slithered them across the billiard table.

"Coming in, George?" Blodgett roared.

"Thanks. I'm off to bed."

But he waited, curious as to the destination of the small loan he had just made.

Blodgett with tact threw for reasonable stakes. Roger's play was necessarily small, and he seemed ashamed of the fact. Lambert put plenty on the table, but urged no takers. Wandel varied his wagers. Dalrymple covered everything he could, and had luck.

George studied the intent figures, the eager eyes, as the dice flopped across the table; listened to the polished voices raised to these toys in childish supplications that sang with the petulant accents of negroes. Simultaneously he was irritated and entertained, experiencing a vague, uneasy fear that a requisite side of life, of which this folly might be taken as a symbol, had altogether escaped him. He laughed aloud when Wandel sang something about seven and eleven. His voice resembled a negro's as the peep of a sparrow approaches an eagle's scream.

"What you laughing at, great man? One must talk to them. Otherwise they don't behave, and you see I rolled an eleven. Positive proof."

He gathered in the money he had won.

"Shooting fifty this time."

"Why not shoot?" Dalrymple asked George. "'Fraid you couldn't talk to 'em?"

"Thing doesn't interest me."

"No sport, George Morton."

It was the way it was said that arrested George. Trust Dalrymple when he had had enough to drink to air his dislikes. The others glanced up.

"How much have you got there?" George asked quietly.

With a slightly startled air Dalrymple ran over his money.

"Pretty nearly three. Why?"

"Call it three," George said.

He gathered the dice from the table. The others drew back, leaving, as it were, the ring clear.

"I'll throw you just once," George said, "for three hundred. High man to throw. On?"

"Sure," Dalrymple said, thickly.

George counted out his money and placed it on the table. He threw a five. Dalrymple couldn't do better than a four. George rattled the dice, and, rather craving some of the other's Senegambian chatter, rolled them. They rested six and four. Dalrymple didn't try to hide his delight.

"Stung, old George Morton! Never come a ten again."

"There'll come another ten," George promised.

He continued to roll, a trifle self-conscious in his silence, while Dalrymple bent over the table, desirous of a seven, while the others watched, absorbed.

Sixes and eights fell, and other numbers, but for half-a-dozen throws no seven or ten.

"Come you seven!" Dalrymple sang.

"You've luck, George," Lambert commented. "I wouldn't lay against you now. I'll go you fifty,

Driggs, on his ten."

"Done!"

The next throw the dice turned up six and four.

"The very greatest of men," Wandel said, ruefully.

While George put the money in his pocket Dalrymple straightened, frowning.

"Double or quits! Revenge!"

"I said once," George reminded him. "I'm off to bed."

The others resumed their play. Dalrymple stared at George, an ugly light in his eyes. George nodded, and the other followed him to the door. George handed him a hundred dollars.

"Save you running upstairs. How much do you owe me now?"

"Couple hundred."

"I shouldn't worry about that," George laughed. "When you want a good deal more and it's inconvenient to run upstairs I might save you some trouble."

"Now that's white of you," Dalrymple condescended, and went, a trifle unsteadily, back to the table.

George carried to his room an impression that he had thoroughly soiled his hands at last, but unavoidably. Of course he had scorned Blodgett for involving Sinclair. His own case was very different. Besides, he hadn't actually involved Dalrymple yet, but he had made a start. Dalrymple had always gunned for him. More than ever since Sylvia's announcement, George felt the necessity of getting Dalrymple where he

could handle him. If she had chosen Dalrymple, of course, money would serve only until the greedy youth could get his fingers in the Planter bags. He shook with a quick repugnance. No matter who won her it mustn't be Dalrymple. He would stop that at any cost.

He sat for some time on the edge of the bed, studying the pattern of the rug. Was Dalrymple the man to arouse a grand passion in her? She had said:

"I can't always be running away from you."

She had told him and no one else. Was the thing calculation, quite bereft of love? Oh, no. George couldn't imagine he was of such importance she would flee that far to be rid of him; but he went to bed at last, confessing the situation had elements he couldn't grasp. Perhaps, when he knew surely who the man was, they would become sufficiently ponderable.

XI

He was up early after a miserable night, and failed to rout his depression with a long ride over country roads. When he got back in search of breakfast he found the others straggling down. First of all he saw Dalrymple, white and unsteady; heard him asking for Sylvia. Sylvia hadn't appeared.

"Who's for church?" Blodgett roared.

Mrs. Sinclair offered to shepherd the devout. They weren't many. Men even called Blodgett names for this newest recreation he had appeared to offer.

"How late did you play?" George asked Blodgett.

"Until, when I looked at my watch, I thought it must be last evening. These young bloods are too keen for Papa Blodgett."

"Get into you?" George laughed.

"I usually manage to hang on to my money," Blodgett bragged, "but the stakes ran bigger and bigger. I'll say one thing for young Dalrymple. He's no piker. Wrote I. O. U's until he wore out his fountain pen. I could paper a room with what I got. I'd be ashamed to collect them."

"Why?" George asked, shortly. "When he wrote them he knew they had to be redeemed."

Blodgett grinned.

"I expect he was a little pickled. Probably's forgot he signed them. I won't make him unhappy with his little pieces of paper."

"Daresay he'll be grateful," George said, dryly.

His ride had brought no appetite. After breakfast he avoided people with a conviction that his only business here was to see Sylvia again, then to escape. It was noon before she appeared with Betty. He caught them walking from the hall to the library, and he studied Sylvia's face with anxious curiosity. It disappointed, repelled him. It was quite unchanged, as full of colour as usual, as full of unfriendliness. She nodded carelessly, quite as if nothing had happened—gave him the identical, remote greeting to which he had become too accustomed. And last evening he had fancied her nearer! He noticed, however, that she had put her hands behind her back.

"I hope you're feeling better."

"Better! I haven't been ill," she flashed.

Betty helped him out.

"Last night Mrs. Sinclair told us you had a headache."

"You ought to know, Betty, that means I was tired."

But George noticed she no longer looked at him. She hurried on.

"Dolly!" he heard her laugh. "You must have sat up rather late."

"Trying to forget my worry about you, Sylvia. Guess it gave me your headache."

George shrugged his shoulders and edged away, measuring his chances of seeing her alone. They were slender, for as usual she was a magnet, yet luck played for him and against her after luncheon, bringing them at the same moment from different directions to the empty hall. She wanted to hurry by, as if he were a disturbing shadow, but he barred her way.

"I suppose I should say I'm sorry I hurt you last night. I'll say it, if you wish, but I'm not particularly sorry."

She showed him her hands then, spread them before him. They trembled, but that was all. They recorded no marks of his precipitancy.

"I shouldn't expect you to be sorry. After that certainly you will never speak to me again."

"Will you tell me now who it is?" he asked.

Her temper blazed.

"I ought always to know what to expect from you."

She ran back to the door through which she had entered.

"Oh, Dolly!"

Dalrymple met her on the threshold.

"Take me for a walk," she said. "It won't hurt you."

Dalrymple indicated George.

"Morton coming?"

She shook her head and ran lightly upstairs.

"No, I'm not going," George said. "She's right. The fresh air will do you good."

"Thanks," Dalrymple answered, petulantly. "I'm quite capable of prescribing for myself."

He went out in search of his hat and coat.

George watched him, letting all his dislike escape. Continually they hovered on the edge of a break, but Dalrymple wouldn't quite permit it now. George was confident that the seed sown last night would flower.

He was glad when Mundy telephoned before dinner about some difficulties of transportation that might have been solved the next day. George sprang at the excuse, however, refused Blodgett's offer of a car to town, and drove to the station.

Dalrymple and Sylvia hadn't returned.

XII

In town Goodhue, too, read his discontent.

"You look tired out, George," he said the next morning. "Evidently Blodgett's party wasn't much benefit."

"I'm learning to dislike parties," George answered. "You were wise to duck it. What was the matter? Didn't fancy the Blodgett brand of hospitality?"

"Promised my mother to spend the week-end at Westbury. I'd have enjoyed it. I'm really growing fond of Blodgett."

There it was again, and you couldn't question Goodhue. Always he said just what he meant, or he kept his opinions to himself. Every word of praise for Blodgett reached George as a direct charge of disloyalty, of bad judgment, of narrow-mindedness. His irritation increased. He was grateful for the mass of work in which he was involved. That chained his imagination by day, but at night he wearily reviewed the past five years, seeking his points of weakness, some fatal omission.

Perhaps his chief fault had been too self-centred a pursuit of Sylvia. Because of her he had repressed the instincts to which he saw other men pandering as a matter of course. Dalrymple did, yet she preferred him, perhaps to the point of making a gift of herself. He had avoided even those more legitimate pleasures of which the dice had appealed to him as a type. What was the use of it? Why had he done it? Yet even now, and still because of her, when you came to that, he had no desire to turn aside to the brighter places where plumed creatures flutter fatefully. It was a species of tragedy that he had to keep himself for one who didn't want him.

It stared at him at breakfast from the page of a

newspaper. It was amazing that the journal saw nothing grotesque in such a union; found it, to the contrary, sensible and beneficial, not only to the persons involved, but to the entire country.

Planter, the article pointed out, was no longer capable of bringing a resistless energy to his house which was a notable stone in the country's financial structure. Should any chance weaken that the entire building would react. His son was at present too young and inexperienced to watch that stone, to keep it intact. Later, of course—but one had to consider the present. To be sure there were partners, but after the fashion of great egoists Mr. Planter had avoided admitting any outstanding personality to his firm. It was a happy circumstance that Cupid, and so forth—for the senior partner of Blodgett and Sinclair was more than an outstanding personality in Wall Street. Some of his recent achievements were comparable with Mr. Planter's earlier ones. The dissolution of his firm and his induction into the house of Planter and Company were prophesied.

George continued to eat his breakfast mechanically. At least it wasn't Dalrymple, yet that resolution would have been less astonishing. Josiah Blodgett, fat, middle-aged, of no family, married to the beautiful and brilliant Sylvia Planter! But was it grotesque? Wasn't the paper right? He had had plenty of proof that his own judgment of Blodgett was worthless. He crumpled the paper in his hand and stood up. His judgment was worth this: he was willing to swear Sylvia Planter didn't love the man she had elected to marry.

What did other people think?

Wandel was at hand. George stopped on his way out.

The little man was still in bed, sipping coffee while he, too, studied that disturbing page; yet, when he had sent his man from the room, he didn't appear to find about it anything extraordinary.

"Good business all round," he commented, "although I must admit I'm surprised Sylvia had the common-sense to realize it. Impulsive sort, didn't you think, George, who would fly to some fellow because she'd taken a fancy to him? Phew! Planter plus Blodgett! It'll make her about the richest girl in America, why not say the world? Some households are uneasy this morning. Well! When you come down to it, what's the difference between railroads and mills? Between mines and real estate? One's about as useful as the others."

"It's revolting," George said.

Wandel glanced over his paper.

"What's up, great man? Nothing of the sort. Blodgett has his points."

"As usual, you don't mean what you say," George snapped.

"But I do, my dear George."

"Blodgett's not like the people he plays with."

"Isn't that a virtue?" Wandel asked. "Perhaps it's why those people like him."

"But do they really?"

"You're purposely blind if you don't see it," Wandel answered. "Why the deuce don't you?"

George feared he had let slip too much. With others

he would have to guard his interest closer, and he would delay the final break he had quite decided upon with Blodgett.

"Just the same," he muttered, ill at ease, preparing to leave, "I'd like Lambert's opinion."

"You don't fancy this has happened," Wandel said, "without Lambert's knowing all about it?"

George left without answering. At least he knew. It was simpler, consequently, to discipline himself. His manner disclosed nothing when he made the necessary visit to Blodgett. The round face was radiant. The narrow eyes burned with happiness.

"You're a cagy old Brummell," George said. "I've just seen it in the paper with the rest of the world. When's it coming off?"

Blodgett's content faded a trifle.

"She says not for a long time yet, but we'll see. Trust Josiah to hurry things all he can."

"Congratulations, anyway," George said. "You know you're entitled to them."

But he couldn't offer his hand. With that he had an instinct to tear the happiness from the other's face.

"You bet I am," Blodgett was roaring. "Any fool can see I'm pleased as punch."

George couldn't stomach any more of it. He started out, but Blodgett, rather hesitatingly, summoned him back. George obeyed, annoyed and curious.

"A good many years ago, George," Blodgett began, "I was a damned idiot. I remember telling you that

when Papa Blodgett got married it would be to the right girl."

"The convenient girl," George sneered. "Don't you think you're doing it?"

"Now see here, George. None of that. You forget it. I'm sorry I ever thought or said such stuff. You get it through your head just what this is—plain adoration."

He sprang to his feet in an emotional outburst that made George writhe.

"I don't see why God has been so good to me."

XIII

George escaped and hurried upstairs. Lambert was there, but he didn't mention the announcement, and George couldn't very well lead him. No one who did talk of it in his presence, however, shared his bitter disapproval. Most men dwelt as Wandel did on the material values of such a match, which, far from diminishing Sylvia's brilliancy, would make it burn brighter than ever.

Occasionally he saw Sylvia and Blodgett together. For him she had that air of seeking an unreal pleasure, but she was always considerate of Blodgett, who seemed perpetually on the point of clasping her publicly in his arms. A recurrent contact was impossible for George. He went to Blodgett finally, and over his spirited resistance broke the last tie.

"My remaining on your pay-roll," he complained, "is pure charity. I don't want it. I won't have it. God knows I'm grateful for all you've done for me. It's

been a lot."

"Never forget you've done something for Blodgett," the stout man said, warmly. "There's no question but you've earned every penny you've had from me. We've played and worked together a long time, George. I don't see just because you've grown up too fast why you've got to make Papa Blodgett unhappy."

George had no answer, but he didn't have to see much of the beaming beau after that, nor for a long time did he encounter Sylvia at all intimately. Lambert, himself, unwittingly brought them together in the spring.

"Why not run down to Oakmont with me?" he said, casually, one Friday morning. "Father's always asking why you're never around."

"Your father might be pleased to know why," George said.

"Dark ages!" Lambert said. "We're in the present now. Come ahead."

The invitation to enter the gates! But it brought to George none of the glowing triumph he had anticipated. He knew why Lambert had offered it, because he considered Sylvia removed from any possible unpleasant aftermath of the dark ages. The man Morton didn't need any further chastisement; but he went, because he knew what Lambert didn't, that the man Morton wasn't through with Sylvia yet; that he was going to find out why she had chosen Blodgett when, except on the score of money, she might have beckoned better from nearly any direction; that he was curious why she had told the man Morton first of all.

They rolled in at the gate. There he had stood, and there she, when she had set her dog on him. Then around the curve to the great house and in at the front door with an aging Simpson and a younger servant to compete for his bag and his coat and hat. How Simpson scraped—Simpson who had ordered him to go where he belonged, to the back door. What was the matter with him that he couldn't experience the elation with which the moment was crowded?

Mrs. Planter met him with her serene manner of one beyond human frailties. You couldn't expect her to go back and remember. Such a return to her would be beyond belief.

"You've not been kind to us, Mr. Morton. You've never been here before."

And that night she had walked through the doorway treating him exactly as if he had been a piece of furniture which had annoyingly got itself out of place.

Lambert's eyes were quizzical.

Old Planter wasn't at all the bear, cracking cumbersome jokes about the young ferret that had stolen a march on the sly old foxes of Wall Street. So that was what his threats amounted to! Or was it because there was nothing whatever of the former George Morton left?

He examined curiously the bowed white head and the dim eyes in which some fire lingered. He could still approximate the emotions aroused by that interview in the library. He felt the old instinct to give this man every concession to a vast superiority. In a sense, he was still afraid of him. He had to get

over that, for hadn't he come here to accomplish just that against which Old Planter had warned him?

"Where," Lambert asked, "is the blushing Josiah?"

George caught the irony of his voice, but his mother explained in her unemotional way that Sylvia and Blodgett were riding.

Certainly all along those early days had been in Lambert's mind, for he led George to the scene of their fight. He faced him there, and he laughed.

"You remember?"

"Why not?" George said. "I was born that day."

"Morton! Morton!" Lambert mused.

George swung and caught Lambert's shoulders quickly. There was more than sentiment in his quick, reminiscent outburst. It seemed even to himself to carry another threat.

"You call me Mr. Morton, or just George, as if I were about as good as you."

Lambert laughed.

"We've had some fair battles since then, haven't we, George? You've done a lot you said you would that day."

"I've scarcely started," George answered. "I'm a dismal failure. Perhaps I'll brace up."

"You're hard to satisfy," Lambert said.

George dug at the ground with his heel.

"All the greater necessity to find ultimate

satisfaction," he grumbled.

Lambert glanced at him inquiringly.

"I suppose," George continued, "I ought to thank you and your sister for not reminding your parents what I was some years ago, for not blurting it out to a lot of other people."

"You've shown me," Lambert said, "it would have been vicious to have put any stumbling blocks in your way. Driggs is right. He usually is. You're a very great man."

But George shook his head, and accompanied Lambert back to the house with the despondency of failure.

Sylvia and Blodgett were back, lounging with Mr. and Mrs. Planter about a tea table which servants had carried to a sunny spot on the lawn. At sight of George Sylvia's colour heightened. Momentarily she hesitated to take his offered hand, then bowed to the presence of the others.

"You didn't tell me, Lambert, you were bringing any one."

Blodgett's welcome was cordial enough to strike a balance.

"Never see anything of you these days, George. He makes money, Mrs. Planter, too fast to bother with an old plodder like me. Thank the Lord I've still got cash in his firm."

That he should ever call that quiet, assured figure mother-in-law! Mrs. Planter, however, showed no displeasure. She commenced to chat with Lambert. Sylvia, George reflected, might with profit have

borrowed some of her mother's serenity. Still she managed to entertain him over the tea cups as if he had been any casual, uninteresting guest.

That hour, nevertheless, furnished George an ugly ordeal, for Blodgett's attentions were perpetual, and Sylvia appeared to appreciate them, treating him with a consideration that let through at least that affection the man had surprisingly drawn from so many of his acquaintances.

A secretary interrupted them, hurrying from the house with an abrupt concern stamped on his face, standing by awkwardly as if not knowing how to commence.

"What is it, Straker?" Mr. Planter asked.

"Mr. Brown's on the 'phone, sir. I think you'd better come. He said he didn't want to bother you until he was quite sure. There seems no doubt now."

"Of what, Straker?" Mr. Planter asked. "Wouldn't it have kept through tea time?"

The secretary seemed reluctant to speak. The women glanced at him uneasily. Lambert started to rise. In spite of his preoccupation George had a suspicion of the truth. All at once Blodgett half expressed it, bringing his fist noisily down on the table.

"The Huns have torpedoed an American boat!"

Straker blurted out the truth.

"Oh, no, Mr. Blodgett. It's the *Lusitania*, but apparently the losses are serious."

For a moment the silence was complete. Even the servants forgot their errands and remained immobile,

with gaping faces. An evil premonition swept George. There were many Americans on the *Lusitania*. He knew a number quite well. Undoubtedly some had gone down. Which of his friends? One properly asked such questions only when one's country was at war. The United States wasn't at war with Germany. Would they be now? How was the sinking of the *Lusitania* going to effect him?

Old Planter, Blodgett, and Lambert were already on their feet, starting for the door. Mrs. Planter rose, but unhurriedly, and went close to her husband's side. In that movement George fancied he had caught at last something warm and human. Probably she had weighed the gravity of this announcement, and was determined to wheedle the old man from too much excitement, from too great a temper, from too thorough a preoccupation with the changes bound to reach Wall Street from this tragedy.

"I want to talk to Brown, too, if you please," Blodgett roared.

They crowded into the hall, all except Sylvia and George who had risen last. He had measured his movements by hers. They entered the library together while the others hurried through to Mr. Planter's study where the telephone stood, anxious to speak with Brown's voice. She wanted to follow, but he stopped her by the table where his cap had rested that night, from which he had taken her photograph.

"You might give me a minute," he said.

She faced him.

"What do you want? Why did you come here, Mr.

Morton?"

"For this minute."

"You've heard what's happened," she said, scornfully, "and you can persist in such nonsense."

"Call it anything you please," he said. "To me such nonsense happens to be vital. It's your fault that I have to take every chance, even make one out of a tragedy like that."

He nodded toward the study door through which strained voices vibrated.

"Children, too!—Vanderbilt!—More than a thousand! —Good God, Brown!"

And Blodgett's roar, throaty with a new ferocity:

"We'll fight the swine now."

George experienced a fresh ill-feeling toward the man, who impressed him as possessing something of the attributes of such animals. He glanced at Sylvia's hands.

"You're not going to marry him."

She smiled at him pityingly, but her colour was fuller. He wondered why she should remain at all when it would be so easy to slip through the doorway to the protection of Blodgett and the others. Of course to hurt him again.

"I don't believe you love him. I'm sure you don't. You shan't throw yourself away."

Her foot tapped the rug. He watched her try to make her smile amused. Her failure, he told himself, offered proof that he was right.

"One can no longer even be angry with you," she said. "Who gave you a voice in my destiny?"

"You," he answered, quickly, "and I don't surrender my rights. If I can help it you're not going to throw away your youth. Why did you tell me first of all you were going to be married?"

She braced herself against the table, staring at him. In her eyes he caught a fleeting expression of fright. He believed she was held at last by a curiosity more absorbing than her temper.

"What do you mean?"

Old Planter's bass tones throbbed to them.

"Nothing can keep us out of the war now."

The words came to George as from a great distance, carrying no tremendous message. In the whole world there existed for him at that moment nothing half so important as the lively beauty of this woman whose intolerance he had just vanquished.

"Your youth belongs to youth," he hurried on, knowing she wouldn't answer his question. "I've told you this before. I won't see you turn your back on life. Fair warning! I'll fight any way I can to prevent it."

She straightened, showing him her hands.

"You're very brave. You fight by attacking a woman, by trying behind his back to injure a very dear man. And you've no excuse whatever for fighting, as you call it."

"Yes, I have," he said, quickly, "and you know perfectly well that I'm justified in attacking any man

you threaten to marry."

"You're mad, or laughable," she said. "Why have you? Why?"

"Because long ago I told you I loved you. Whether it was really so then, or whether it is now, makes no difference. You said I shouldn't forget."

He stepped closer to her.

"You said other things that gave me, through pride if nothing else, a pretty big share in your life. You may as well understand that."

Her anger quite controlled her now. She raised her right hand in the old impulsive gesture to punish his presumption with the maximum of humiliation; and this time, also, he caught her wrist, but he didn't hold it away. He brought it closer, bent his head, and pressed his lips against her fingers.

He was startled by the retreat of colour from her face. He had never seen it so white. He let her wrist go. She grasped the table's edge. She commenced to laugh, but there was no laughter in her blank, colourless expression. A feminine voice without accent came to them:

"Sylvia! How can you laugh?"

He glanced up. Mrs. Planter stood in the study doorway. Sylvia straightened; apparently controlled herself. Her colour returned.

"It was Mr. Morton," she explained, unevenly. "He said something so absurdly funny. Perhaps he hasn't grasped this tragedy."

The others came in, a voluble, horrified group.

"What's the matter with you, George?" Blodgett bellowed. "Don't you understand what's happened?"

"Not quite," George said, looking at Sylvia, "but I intend to find out."

XIV

To find out, George appreciated at once, would be no simple task. Immediately Sylvia raised new defences. She seemed abetted by this incredible happening on a gray sea.

"I shall go," Lambert said. "How about you, George?"

"Why should I go?" George asked. "I haven't thought about it yet."

The scorn in Sylvia's eyes made him uneasy. Why did people have to be so impulsive? That was the way wars were made.

During the days that followed he did think about it too absorbingly for comfort, weighing to the penny the sacrifice his unlikely going would involve. An inherent instinct for a fight could scarcely be satisfied at such a cost. Patriotism didn't enter his calculations at all. He believed it had resounding qualities only because it was hollow, being manufactured exactly as a drum is made. Surely there were enough impulsive and fairly useless people to do such a job.

Then without warning Wandel confused his apparently flawless logic. Certainly Wandel was the least impulsive of men and he was also capable of uncommon usefulness, yet within a week of the sinking he asked George if he didn't want to move to

his apartment to keep things straight during a long absence.

"Where are you going, Driggs?"

"I've been drifting too long," Wandel answered. "Unless I go somewheres, do something, I'll become as mellow as Dolly. I've not been myself since the business started. I suppose it's because I happen to be fond of the French and the British and a few ideas of theirs. So I'm going to drive an ambulance for them."

George fancied Wandel's real motive wasn't so easily expressed. He longed to know it, but you couldn't pump Wandel.

"You're an ass," was all he said.

"Naturally," Wandel agreed. "Only asses go to war."

"Do you think it will help for you to get a piece of shell through your head?"

"Quite as much as for any other ass."

"Why don't you say what you mean?" George asked, irritably.

"Perhaps you ask that," Wandel drawled, "because you don't understand what I mean to say."

"I won't take care of your apartment," George snapped. "I won't have any hand in such a piece of foolishness."

With Goodhue, however, he went to the pier to see Wandel off; absorbed with the little man the sorrowful and apprehensive atmosphere of the odorous shed; listened to choked farewells; saw brimming eyes; shared the pallid anticipations of

those about to venture forth upon an unnatural sea; touched at last the very fringe of war.

"Why is he doing it?" George asked as Goodhue and he drove across town to the subway. "I've never counted Driggs a sentimentalist."

"I'm not sure," Goodhue answered, "this doesn't prove he isn't. He's always had an acute appreciation of values. Don't you remember? We used to call him 'Spike'."

George let himself drift with events, but Wandel's departure increased his uneasiness. Suppose he should be forced by circumstances to abandon everything; against his better judgment to go? Automatically his thoughts turned to Squibs. He recalled his advice.

"Don't let your ideas smoulder in your head. Come home and talk them over."

He sent a telegram and followed it the next day. The Baillys met him at the station, affectionately, without any reproaches for his long absence. The menace was in the air here, too, for Mrs. Bailly's first question, sharply expressed, was:

"You're not going, if——"

"I don't want to go," he answered.

Bailly studied him, but he didn't say anything.

That afternoon there was a boat race on Lake Carnegie. The Alstons drove the Baillys and George down some hospitable resident's lane to an

advantageous bank near the finish line. They spread rugs and made themselves comfortable there, but the party was subdued. Squibs and Mr. Alston didn't seem to care to talk. Betty asked Mrs. Bailly's question, received an identical answer, and fell silent, too. Only Mrs. Alston appeared to detect no change in the world, remaining cheerfully imperial as if alarms couldn't possibly approach her abruptly.

Even to George such a scene, sharing one planet with the violences of Europe, appeared contradictory. The fancifully garbed undergraduates, who ran along the bank; the string of automobiles on the towpath opposite; the white and gleaming pleasure boats in the canal; the shells themselves, with coloured oar-blades that flashed in the sunlight; most of all the green frame for this pleasantly exciting contest had an air of telling him that everything unseen was rumour, dream stuff; either that, or else that the seen was visionary, while in those remote places existed the only material world, the revolting and essential realities.

Bailly at last interrupted his revery, with his long, thin arm making a gesture that included the athletes; the running, youthful partisans.

"How many are we going to lose or get back with twisted minds?"

"Keep quiet," his wife said in a panic.

Mrs. Alston laughed pleasantly.

"Don't worry. Woodrow will keep us out of it."

XV

Back in the little study Bailly expressed his doubt.

"He may do it now, but later——"

"Remember you're not going, George," Mrs. Bailly cried.

"I think not."

She patted his hand, while Bailly looked on with his old expression of doubt and disapproval. When Mrs. Bailly had left them, George told the tutor of Wandel's surprising venture, asking his opinion.

"It's hard to form one," Bailly admitted. "He's always puzzled me. Would it surprise you if I said I think he at least has grafted on his brain some of Allen's generous views?"

"Oh, come, sir. You can't make war an ideal expression of the brotherhood of man. Far better that all men should be suspicious strangers."

Bailly drew noisily at his pipe.

"It often pleases you to misunderstand," he said. "Wandel, I fancy, would take Allen's theories and make something more practical of them. Understand I am a pacifist—thorough-paced. War is folly. War is dreadful. It cannot be conceived in a healthy brain. But when a fact rises up before you you'd better face it. Wandel probably does. The Allens probably don't —don't realize that we must win this war as the only alternative to the world pacing of an autocratic foot that would crush social progress like a serpent, that would boot back the brotherhood of man, since you seem to enjoy the phrase, unthinkable years."

"After admitting that," George asked, quickly, "you can still tell me that I ought to accept the point of

view of your rotten, illogical Socialists?"

"Even in this war," Bailly confessed, "most socialists are pacifists. No, they're not an elastic crowd. It amuses me that a lot of the lords of the land, leading an unthinking portion of the proletariat, will permit them to carry on their work in spite of themselves."

"I despise such theorists," George burst out. "They are unsound. They are dangerous."

Bailly smiled.

"Just the same, the very ones they want to reform are going to give them the opportunity to do it."

"They're all like Allen," George sneered, "purchasable."

Bailly shook his head, waved his pipe vehemently.

"Virtue's flaws don't alter its really fundamental quality."

"Then you agree all Socialists are knaves or fools," George stormed.

"Perhaps, George," Bailly said, patiently, "you'll define a conservative for me. There. Never mind. Somewhere in between we may find an honest generosity, a wise sympathy. It may come from this war—a huge and wise balance of power of the right, an honest recognition of men as individuals rather than as members of classes. Perhaps your friend Wandel is on the track of something of the sort. I like to think it is really what the war is being fought for."

"The war," George said, "is being fought for men with fat paunches and pocket-books."

"Then you're quite sure you don't want to go?"

"Why should I as long as my stomach and my pocket-book are comfortable? But I'm not sure whether I'll go or not. That's what worries me."

"You've made," Bailly said, testily, "enough out of the war to warrant your giving it something."

George grinned. It was quite like old times.

"Even myself, on top of all the rest I might make out of it by staying back?"

"You're not as selfish as you'd have me believe," Bailly cried.

George quoted a phrase of Wandel's since Bailly seemed just now to approve of the adventurer.

"The man that keeps himself makes the world better."

Bailly drove him out of the room to dress for dinner.

"I won't talk to you any more," he said. "I won't curse the loiterer at the base until I am sure he isn't going to climb."

XVI

At least George wouldn't have to decide at once. When it became clear that for the present Mrs. Alston's optimism was justified he breathed easier. With Goodhue, Lambert, and Mundy he applied himself unreservedly to his work. Consequently he didn't visit much, didn't see Sylvia again until the fall when he met her at a dinner at the Goodhues'. She shrank from him perceptibly, but there was no escape. He studied her with an easier mind. No date

for her wedding had been set. Until that moment should come there was nothing he could do. What he would be able to accomplish then was problematical. Something. She shouldn't throw herself away on Blodgett.

"It must be comforting," he heard her say to Goodhue, "to know if trouble comes your wonderful firm will be taken care of."

George guessed she had meant him to hear that.

"I'm sure I hope so," Goodhue answered her, "but what do you mean?"

"I heard Mr. Morton say once he didn't think he'd care to go to war. Didn't I, Mr. Morton?"

Goodhue, clearly puzzled by her manner, laughed.

"Give us something more useful, Sylvia. He's a born fighter."

"I believe I said it," George answered her. "There might be problems here I couldn't very well desert."

Her eyes wavered. He recalled her hysterical manner that evening at Oakmont. She still sought chances to hurt him. In spite of Blodgett, then, she recognized a state of contest between them. He smiled contentedly, for as long as that persisted his cause was alive.

XVII

It languished, however, during the winter as did Blodgett's hopes of a speedy wedding. The Planters' Fifth Avenue home remained closed, because of Mr. Planter's health. Sylvia and her mother went south

with him. Blodgett made a number of flying trips, deserting his affairs to that extent to be with Sylvia. George was satisfied for the present to let things drift.

Dalrymple certainly had drifted with events. He had taken no pains to hide the shock of Sylvia's engagement. George of all people could understand his disappointment, his helpless rage; but Dalrymple hadn't bothered him, and he had about decided he never would.

One spring day, quite without warning, he appeared in George's office. It was not long after the Planters' return to Oakmont. What did he want here? Was there any point spending money on him as matters stood?

He looked at Dalrymple, a good deal surprised, reading the dissipation recorded in his face, the nervousness exposed by the mobile hands. All at once he understood why he had come at last. Dalrymple had wandered too far. The patience of his friends had been exhausted. Perhaps Wandel had taken George's hint. At any rate, he had let himself in for it.

"An opportunity to make a little money," Dalrymple was mumbling uneasily. "Need capital. Not much. You said at Blodgett's—just happened to remember it, and was near——"

"How much?" George demanded, stopping his feeble lies.

Dalrymple, George suspected, because of his manner, asked for less than half what he had come to get.

"What say to a couple thousand? Make it five

hundred more if you can. Not much in the way of security."

"Never mind the security."

George pressed a button, and directed the clerk who responded to draw up a note.

"Got to sign something?" Dalrymple asked, suspiciously.

George smiled.

"Do you mind my keeping a little record of where my money goes—in place of security?"

Dalrymple was quite red.

"All right, if you insist."

"I insist. Care to change your mind?"

"No. Only thought it was just a little loan between—friends."

The word left his tongue with difficulty. George guessed that the other retained enough decency to loathe himself for having to use it. The nervousness of the long fingers increased while the clerk prepared the note and George wrote the check. George put a pen in the unsteady hand.

"Sign here, please."

Dalrymple obeyed with a signature, shaky, barely legible.

"Nice of you to do me a favour. Appreciate it. Thanks."

To George it would have been worth that money to

find out just how Sylvia's extended engagement had affected Dalrymple. Was it responsible for his speeding up on the dangerous path of pleasure? Of that he could learn only what the other chose to disclose, probably nothing. But what was he waiting for now that he had the money? Why were his fingers twitching faster than ever?

"Didn't see Lambert when I came in," he managed.

"I daresay he's about," George said. "Want him?"

Dalrymple raised his hand.

"That's just it," he whispered. "Rather not see Lambert. Rather this little transaction were kept sub rosa. You understand. No point Lambert's knowing."

"Why not?" George asked, coolly, feeling himself on the edge of the truth.

"I'm a little off the Planters," Dalrymple said.

"Since when?"

Dalrymple's face became redder than ever. For a moment his nervousness abandoned him. He seemed to stiffen with violent thoughts.

"Don't like buying and selling of women in any family. Not as decent as slavery."

George rose quietly. He hadn't expected just this.

"Be careful," he warned. "What are you talking about?"

"What the whole town talks about," Dalrymple burst out. "You know her. I ask you. Hasn't she enough without selling herself, body and soul? No better than an unmentionable——"

George sprang. He didn't stop to tell himself that Dalrymple was unaccountable, in a sense, out of his head. He didn't dare stop, because he knew if Dalrymple finished that sentence he would try to kill him. Dalrymple's mouth fell open, in fact, before the unexpected attack. He couldn't complete the sentence, didn't try to; drew back against the desk instead; grasped a convenient ink container; threw it; called shrilly for help.

George shook the streaming black liquid from his face. With his stained hands he grasped Dalrymple. His fingers tightened with a feeling of profound satisfaction. No masks now! Finally the enmity of years was unleashed. He had Dalrymple where he had always wanted him.

"One more word——You been saying that kind of thing——"

The hurrying of many feet in the outer office recalled him. The impulsive George Morton crept back beneath the veneer. He let Dalrymple go, drew out his handkerchief, looked distastefully at the black stains on his clothing.

Lambert and Goodhue closed the door on the curious clerks.

"What in heaven's name——"

It was Lambert who had spoken. Goodhue merely shrugged his shoulders, as if he had all along expected such a culmination.

Dalrymple, fingering his throat spasmodically, sank in a chair. His face infused. His breath came audibly.

"Caught him harder than I realized," George

reflected. He spoke aloud with his whimsical smile.

"Looks as if I'd lost my temper. I don't often do it."

He had no regret. He was happy. He believed himself nearer Sylvia than he had ever been. He felt in grasping Dalrymple's throat as if he had touched her hands.

He failed to give its true value, consequently, to Lambert's angry turning on him after Dalrymple's shaking accusation.

"Sorry, Lambert. Had to—to do what I could. He—he was rotten impertinent about—about—Sylvia."

XVIII

Goodhue caught Lambert's arm. In a flash George read the meaning of Dalrymple's charge. Naturally he was the one to do something of the sort, had to try it. He had been afraid of Lambert's knowing of the loan. How much less could he let Lambert learn why George had justifiably shut his mouth.

"Keep quiet," George warned Lambert. "Dicky! Can you get him out of here. He needs attention. I'm not a doctor. He hasn't been himself since he came."

But Lambert wouldn't have it.

"Repeat that, Dolly," he commanded.

George walked to Dalrymple.

"You'll not say another word."

Dalrymple stood up, weaving his fingers in and out; as it were, clasping his hands to George.

"I'm sorry, Morton. Damn sorry. Forget—forget——"

His voice wandered into a difficult silence, as if he had seen this way, too, a chance of implicating himself with Sylvia's brother; but his eyes continued to beg George. They were like the eyes of an animal, caught in a net, beseeching release.

Goodhue gave him his hat. He took it but drew away from the other's touch on his arm.

"Don't think I'm not all right," he said in a frightened voice. "Took me by surprise, but I'm all right—quite all right. Going home."

He glanced at Lambert and again at George, then left the room, pulling at his necktie, Goodhue anxiously at his heels.

"What about it?" Lambert asked George sharply.

George sat down, still trying to rid himself of the black souvenirs of the encounter.

"Don't be a fool. I said nothing about your sister—nothing whatever."

He couldn't get rid of Dalrymple's begging eyes, yet why should he spare him at all?

"The rest of it," he went on, easily, "is between Dalrymple and me."

"I'm not sure," Lambert challenged.

He reminded George of the younger Lambert who had advanced with a whip in his hand.

"See here," he said. "You can't make me talk about anything I don't care to. I've told you I didn't mention your sister. I couldn't to that fellow."

Lambert spread his hands.

"What is there about you and Sylvia—ever since that day? I believe you, but I tried to give you a licking for her sake once, and I'd do it again."

George laughed pleasantly.

"You make me feel young."

Clearly Lambert meant to warn him, for he went on, still aggressive:

"I care more for her than anybody in the world."

The laughter left George's face.

"Anybody?"

Lambert was self-conscious now.

"Just about. See here. What are you driving at?"

George yawned.

"I must wash up. I've a lot of work to do."

"I'd like to know what went on here," Lambert said.

"Why don't you ask Dalrymple, then?"

"Dolly isn't all bad," Lambert offered as he left. "He's been my friend a good many years."

"Then by all means keep him," George answered, "and keep him to yourself; but when he comes around hang on to the ink pots."

XIX

His apparent good humour didn't survive the closing of the door. His dislike of Dalrymple fattened on his

memory of the incident. It had left a sting. He hadn't stopped the man in time. Selling herself! Was she? She appeared to his mind, no longer intolerant, rather with an air of shame-faced apology for all the world. That was what hurt. He hadn't stopped Dalrymple in time.

But there was no sale yet, nothing whatever, except an engagement which, after a year, showed no symptoms of fruition. Blodgett was aware of it, and couldn't hide his anxiety. Evidently he wanted to talk about it, did talk about it to George when he met him in the hall not long after Dalrymple's visit.

"Why don't you ever run down to Oakmont with Lambert?" he asked.

Only Blodgett would have put such a question, and perhaps even he designed it merely as an entrance to his favourite topic. George evaded with a fairly truthful account of office pressure.

"Old Planter asks after you," Blodgett went on, uncomfortably. "Admires you, because you've done about what he had at your age, and it was easier then. Old man's not well. That's tough on Josiah."

"Tough?"

Blodgett mopped his face with a brilliant handkerchief. His rotund stomach rose and fell with a sigh.

"His gout's worse—all sorts of complications. She's the apple of his eye. Guess you know that. Won't desert him now. Wants to wait till he's better, or—or ——"

He added naïvely:

"Hope to heaven he bucks up soon."

George watched Blodgett's hopes dwindle, for Old Planter didn't buck up, nor did he grow perceptibly worse. From time to time he visited his marble temple, but for the most part men went to him at Oakmont; Blodgett, of course, with his double errand of business and romance, most frequently of all. And Sylvia did cling to her father, but George's satisfaction increased, for he agreed with Wandel: she was capable of a feeling far more powerful than filial devotion. Blodgett, clearly, had failed to arouse it.

Her sense of duty, however, kept her nearly entirely away from George; for Lambert, either because Sylvia had spoken to him, or because he himself had sensed a false step, failed to repeat his invitation to Oakmont. The row with Dalrymple, although that had not been mentioned again, made it unlikely that he ever would.

Dalrymple had dropped out of sight. George heard vaguely that he was taking a rest cure in the northern part of the state. He couldn't fancy meeting him again without desiring to add to the punishment he had already given. The man was impossible. He had sneaked from that room, leaving the note in George's hands, the check in his own pocket. And the check had been cashed. No madness of excitement could account for that.

It wasn't until summer that he ran into him, and with a black temper saw Sylvia at his side. If she only knew! She ought to know. It increased his bad humour that he couldn't tell her.

He regretted the necessity that had made such a

meeting possible. It had, however, for a long time impressed him. Even flabby old Blodgett had noticed, and had advised less work and more play. To combat his feeling of staleness, the relaxing of his long, carefully conditioned muscles, George had forced himself to play polo at a Long Island club into which he had hurried because of his skill at the game, or to take an occasional late round of golf, which he didn't care for particularly but which he managed very well in view of his inexperience. It was while he was ordering dinner with Goodhue one night at the Long Island club that Sylvia and Dalrymple drove up with the Sinclairs. The older pair came straight to the two, while Sylvia and Dalrymple followed with an obvious reluctance.

"We spirited her away for the night," Mrs. Sinclair explained.

She turned to Sylvia.

"My dear, I'll see that you don't cloister yourself any more. Your father's going on for years."

Yet it occurred to George, as he looked at her, that her cloistering had accomplished no change. The alteration in Dalrymple, on the other hand, was striking. George, as he met him with a difficult ease of manner, quite as if nothing had happened, couldn't account for it; for the light-headed look had gone from Dalrymple's eyes, and much of the stamp of dissipation from his face. His hands, too, were quiet. Was it credible he had forgotten the struggle in George's office? No. He had cashed the check; yet his manner suggested a blank memory except, perhaps, for its too-pronounced cordiality.

There was nothing for it but a dinner together. The

Sinclairs expected it, and couldn't be made to understand why it should embarrass any one. Dalrymple really helped matters. His mind worked clearly, and he could, George had to acknowledge, exert a certain charm when he tried. Moreover, he didn't drink, even refusing the cocktail a waiter offered him just before they went inside.

As always George disliked speaking to Sylvia in casual tones of indifferent topics. She met him at first pleasantly enough on that ground—too pleasantly, so that he found himself waiting for some acknowledgment that she had not forgotten; that she still believed in their quarrel. It came at last rather sharply through the topic that was universal just then of General Wood's civilian training camps at Plattsburgh. Lambert had gone. Goodhue would follow the next month, having agreed to that arrangement for the sake of the office. Even Blodgett was there. Sylvia took a great pride in the fact, pointed it at George.

"Although," she laughed, "I'm told he's not popular with his tent mates. I hear he has a telephone fastened to his tent pole. I don't know whether that's true. He's never mentioned it. But I do know he has three secretaries in a house just off the reservation. Of course it's a sacrifice for him to be at Plattsburgh at all."

George stared at her. There was no question. Her voice, her face, expressed a tolerant liking for the man. The engagement had lasted considerably more than a year, and now she had an air of giving a public reminder of its ultimate outcome. Or was it for him alone, as her original announcement had been?

"I'm off next month," Goodhue said. "Lambert writes it's good fun and not at all uncomfortable."

"I'll be with you, Dicky," Dalrymple put in. "Beneficial affair, besides duty, and all that."

George experienced relief at the very moment he resented her attack most. It was still worth while trying to hurt him.

"Practically everyone has gone or is going. It's splendid. When are you booked for, Mr. Morton?"

Even the Sinclairs had silently asked that question. They looked at him expectantly.

"I'm not going at all," he answered, bluntly.

"I remember," she said. "You didn't believe in war or something, wasn't it? But this isn't exactly war."

George smiled.

"Scarcely," he said. "It's hiking, singing, playing cards, rattling off stories, largely done by some old men who couldn't get a job in the army of Methuselah. Why should I waste my time at that?"

"It's a start," Mr. Sinclair said, seriously. "We have to do something."

George hid his sneer. Everywhere the spirit was growing to make any kind of a drum that would bang.

"If you don't think Wilson will keep us out of it," he asked, earnestly, "why not get after Wilson and make him start something general, efficient, fundamental? I've never heard of a President who wasn't sensitive to the pressure of the country."

There was no use talking that way. These people were satisfied with the noise at Plattsburgh. He was glad when the meal ended, when he could get away.

At the automobile he managed to help Sylvia into her cloak, and he took the opportunity to whisper:

"When is the great event coming off?"

She turned, looked at him, and didn't answer. She mounted to the back seat beside Dalrymple.

XX

George didn't see her again until winter. He heard through the desolate Blodgett that she had gone with her parents to the Canadian Rockies.

Nearly everyone seemed to flee north that summer as if in a final effort to cajole play. The Alstons moved to Maine unusually early, and didn't return until late fall. Betty put it plainly enough to him then.

"I'm sorry to be back. Don't you feel the desire to get as far away as possible from things, to escape?"

"To escape what, Betty?"

"That's just it. One doesn't know. Something one doesn't want to know."

It was queer that Betty never asked why he hadn't been to Plattsburgh, never urged a definite decision as to what he would do if——

The "if" lost a little of its power with him. At times he was even inclined to share Mrs. Alston's optimism. It was easy to drift with Washington. Besides, he was too busy to worry about much except his growing

accumulation of profits from bloodshed. He was brought back momentarily when Lambert and Goodhue received commissions as captains in the reserve corps. The Plattsburgh noise still echoed. He couldn't help a feeling of relief when people flocked back and the town became normal again, encouraging him to believe that nothing could happen to tear him away from this fascinating pursuit of getting rich for Sylvia while he waited for her next move.

That came with a stark brutality a few weeks after the holidays. He had seen her only the evening before, sitting next to Blodgett at dinner with a remote expression in her eyes that had made him hopeful. The article in the morning newspaper, consequently, took him more by surprise than the original announcement of the engagement had done. Sylvia and Blodgett would be married on the fifteenth of the following August.

On top of that shock events combined to rebuke his recent confidence. His desires had taken too much for granted. The folly of the Mrs. Alstons and the wisdom of the Baillys and Sinclairs were forced upon him. Wilson wasn't going to keep them out of it. George stood face to face with the decision he had shirked when the *Lusitania* had taken her fatal dive.

It couldn't be shirked again, for the declaration of war appeared to be a matter of days, weeks at the most. The drum was beginning to sound with a rising resonance. Lambert and Goodhue would be among the first to leave. Already they made their plans. They didn't seem to care what became of the business.

"What are you up to, George?" they asked.

He put them off. He wanted to think it out. He didn't care to have his decision blurred by the rattling of a drum. Yet it was patent to him if he should go at all it would be with his partners, among the first. The thought of such a triple desertion appalled him. Mundy was incomparable for system and routine, but if he had possessed the rare selective foresight demanded for the steering of a big business he would long since have been at the helm of his own house. It would be far better, if George had to go, to sell the stock and the mass of soaring securities the firm had acquired; in short, to close out before competitors could squeeze the abandoned ship from the channel.

Why dwell on so wasteful an alternative? Why not turn sanely from so sentimental a choice? It was clear enough to him that it would not long survive the war, all this singing and shouting, this driving forth by older people on the winds of a safe enthusiasm of countless young men to grotesque places of death.

He paced his room. That was just it. It was the present he had to consider, and the present thoughts of people who hadn't yet returned to their inevitable practicality, forgetfulness, and ingratitude; most of all to the present thoughts of Sylvia. To him she had made those thoughts sufficiently plain. Among non-combatant enthusiasts she would be the most exigent. Why swing from choice to choice any longer? To be as he had fancied she would wish, he had struggled, denied, kept himself clean, sought minutely for the proper veneer; and so far he had kept his record straight. With her it was his one weapon. He couldn't throw that away.

He stopped his pacing. He sat before his desk, his

head in his hands, listening to the cacophanous beating of drums by the majority for the anxious marching of a few.

It was settled. He had always known it would be, in just that way.

XXI

George took his physical examination at Governor's Island with the earliest of the candidates for the First Officers' Training Camp. As soon as he had returned to his office he wrote to Bailly:

"I'm going to your cheerful war, after all. I'll drop in the end of the week."

He summoned Lambert and Goodhue. Until then he had told them nothing definite.

"Of course," he said, "we'll have a few months, but before we leave America everything will have to be settled. We'll have to know just where we stand."

Into the midst of their sombre discussion slipped the tinkling of the telephone. George answered. He glanced at the others.

"It's Blodgett. Wants me right away. Something important."

He hurried down, wondering what was up. Blodgett's voice had vibrated with an unaccustomed passion that had left with George an impression of whole-hearted revolt; and when he got in the massive, over-decorated office his curiosity grew, for Blodgett looked as if he had dressed against time and without valet or mirror. The straggly pale hair about the ears was rumpled. His necktie was awry. The pudgy

hands shook a trifle. George's heart quickened. Blodgett had had bad news. What was the worst news Blodgett could have?

"I know," Blodgett began, "that you and your partners have passed and are going to Plattsburgh to become officers."

All at once George caught the meaning of Blodgett's disarray, and his hope was replaced by a mirth he had difficulty hiding.

"You don't mean you've been over to Governor's Island——"

Blodgett stood up.

"Yes," he confessed, solemnly. "Just got back from my physical examination. Would you believe it, George, the darned fools wouldn't have me, because I'm too fat? Called it obese, as if it was some kind of a disease, instead of just my natural inclination to fleshiness."

One of his pudgy hands struck his chest.

"Never stopped to see that my heart's all right, and that's what we want, people whose hearts are all right."

Momentarily the enmity aroused by circumstances fled from George. The man was genuine, suffering from a devastating disappointment; but surely he hadn't called him downstairs only to witness this outbreak.

Blodgett lowered himself to his chair. He wiped his face with one of his gay handkerchiefs. He spoke reasonably.

"My place is at home. All right. I'll make it easier then for the thin people that can go. I'm going to look after you boys. Mundy's not big enough. I've got a man in view I can keep tabs on, and Blodgett'll always be sitting down here seeing you don't get stung."

He sighed profoundly.

"Guess that'll have to be my share."

George would rather have had the man curse him. It struck directly at his pride to submit to this unmasking of his jealous opinion. He strangled his quick impulse to reach forward, to grasp Blodgett's hand, to beg his pardon. Instead he tried to find ways of avoiding the generous gift.

"We can't settle anything yet. A dozen circumstances may arise. The war may end——"

"When you go, George," Blodgett said, wistfully.

And George knew that in the end he couldn't refuse without disclosing everything; that his partners wouldn't let him. It added strangely enough to his discomfort that he should leave the disappointed man with a confident feeling that he need make no move to see Sylvia before going to Plattsburgh. In any case, the camp ought to be over before the fifteenth of August.

His partners were pleased enough by his recital, and determined to accept Blodgett's offer.

"He's the most generous soul that ever lived," Goodhue said, warmly.

Lambert agreed, but George thought he detected a troubled light in his eyes.

Blodgett's generosity continued to worry George, to accuse him. After all, Blodgett had accomplished a great deal more than he. With only one of the necessities he had made friends, had become engaged to Sylvia Planter. No. There was something besides that. He had had an unaffected personality to offer, and—he had said it himself—a heart that was all right.

George asked himself now if Blodgett had helped him in the first place, not because he had been Mr. Alston and Dicky Goodhue's friend, but simply because he had liked him. He was inclined to believe it. He had reached the point where he admitted that many people had been friendly and useful to him because he had what Blodgett lacked, an exceptional appearance, a rugged power behind acquired graces. Squibs, he realized, had put his finger on that long ago. He was glad he was going down. The tutor would give him his usual disciplinary tonic.

But it was a changed Squibs that met George; a nearly silent Squibs, who spoke only to praise; a slightly apprehensive Squibs. George tried to reassure Mrs. Bailly.

"Three months at Plattsburgh, then nobody knows how much longer to whip our division into shape. The war will probably be over before we get across."

But she didn't believe it, nor did her husband.

"You'll be in it, George, before the war's over. Do you know, you're nearer paying me back than you've ever been."

George was uncomfortable before such adulation.

"Please don't think," he protested, "that I'm going

over for any tricky ideals or to save a lot of advanced thinkers from their utter folly."

"Then what are you going for?" Bailly asked.

George was surprised that he lacked an answer.

"Oh, because one has to go," he evaded.

Bailly's smile was contented.

"What better reason could any man want?"

They had an air of showing him about Princeton as if he must absorb its beauties for the last time. Their visit to the Alstons was shrouded with all the sullen accompaniments of a permanent farewell. George was inclined to smile. He hadn't got as far as weighing his chances of being hit; the present was too crowded, stretched too far; included Betty, for instance, and Lambert whom he was surprised to find in the Tudor house, prepared to remain evidently until he should leave for Plattsburgh. The Alstons misgivings centred rather obviously on Lambert. George, when he took Betty's hand to say good-bye that evening, felt with a desolate regret that for the first time in all their acquaintance her fingers failed to reach his mind.

PART IV

THE FOREST

I

"Profession?"

"Member of the firm of Morton, Planter, and Goodhue."

Slightly startled, a fairly youthful product of West Point twisted on the uncomfortable orderly room chair, and glanced from the name on George's card to the tall, well-built figure in a private's uniform facing him. George knew he looked like a soldier, because some confiding idiot had blankly told him so coming up on the train; but he hadn't the first knowledge to support appearances, didn't even know how to stand at attention, was making an effort at it now since it was clearly expected of him, because he had sense enough to guess that the pompous, slightly ungrammatical young man would insist during the next three months on many such tributes.

"I see. You're *the* Morton."

George was pleased the young man was impressed. He experienced again the feelings with which he had gone to Princeton. He was being weighed, not as skilfully as Bailly had done it, but in much the same fashion. He had a quick thought that it was going to be nice to be at school again.

"Any special qualifications of leadership?"

The question took George by surprise. He hesitated. A reserve officer, sitting by to help, asked:

"Weren't you captain of the Princeton football team a few years ago?"

"Yes, but we were beaten."

"You must learn to say, 'sir,' Mr. Morton, when you address an officer."

George flushed. That was etching his past rather too sharply. Then he smiled, and amused at the silly business, mimicked Simpson's servility.

"Very well, sir. I'll remember, sir."

The West Point man was pleased, he was even more impressed, because he knew football. He made marks on the card. When George essayed a salute and stepped aside for the next candidate he knew he wasn't submerged in this mass of splendid individualities which were veiled by the similarity of their uniforms.

Lambert, Goodhue, and he were scattered among different companies. That was as well, he reflected, since his partners already wore officers' hat cords. The spare moments they had, nevertheless, they spent together, mulling over Blodgett's frequent reports which they never found time thoroughly to digest. Even George didn't worry about that, for his confidence in Blodgett was complete at last.

He hadn't time to worry about much, for that matter, beyond the demands of each day, for Plattsburgh was like Princeton only in that it aroused all his will power to find the right path and to stick to it. At times he wished for the nearly smooth brain with which he had entered college. He had acquired too many wrinkles of logic, of organization, of efficiency, of common-sense, to survive these months without frequent mad desires to talk out in meeting, without too much humorous appreciation of some of the arbiters of his destiny. Regular army officers gave him the impression of having been forced through a

long, perpetually contracting corridor until they had come out at the end as narrow as one of the sheets of paper work they loved so well. But he got along with them. That was his business. He was pointed out enviously as one of the football captains. It was a football captains' camp. All such giants were slated for company or battery commander's commissions at least.

If he got it, George wondered if he would hate a captain's uniform as much as the private's one he wore.

With the warm weather the week-ends offered sometimes a relief. Men's wives or mothers had taken little houses in the town or among the hills, and the big hotel on the bluff opened its doors and welcomed other wives and mothers, and many, many girls who would become both a little sooner than they had fancied because of this.

Betty arrived among the first, chaperoned for the time by the Sinclairs. George dined with them, asked Betty about Sylvia, and received evasive responses. Sylvia was surely coming up later. Betty was absorbed, anyway, in her own affairs, he reflected unhappily. He felt lost in this huge place where nearly everyone seemed to be paired.

After dinner Lambert remained with Betty and Mrs. Sinclair, but George and Mr. Sinclair wandered, smoking, through the grove above the lake. George had had no idea that the news, for so long half expected, would affect him as it did.

"I suppose," Sinclair muttered, "you've heard about poor Blodgett."

"What?" George asked, breathlessly. "We've little time for newspapers here."

"I'm not sure," Sinclair answered, "that it's in the papers, but in town everybody's talking about it. Sylvia's thrown him over."

II

George paused and considered the glowing end of his cigar. Instead of vast relief he first of all experienced a quick sympathy for Blodgett. He wanted to say something; it was expected of him, but he was occupied with the effort to get rid of this absurd sympathy, to replace it by a profound and unqualified satisfaction.

"Why? Do you know why?" was all he managed.

That was what he wanted, her private reason for this step which all at once left the field quite open, and shifted their struggle back to its old, honest basis. It was what he had told her would happen, must happen. Since she had agreed at last why had she involved poor old Blodgett at all? Had that merely been one of her defences which had become finally untenable? Had George conceivably influenced her to its assumption, at last to its abandonment?

He stared at the opaque white light which rose like a mist from the waters of the lake. He seemed to see, as on a screen, an adolescent figure with squared shoulders and flushed cheeks tearing recklessly along on a horse that wasn't sufficiently untamed to please its rider. He replaced his cigar between his lips. Naturally she would be the most exigent of enthusiasts. Probably that was why Blodgett had been so pitifully anxious to crowd his bulk into the

army. She had to be untrammelled to cheer on the younger, stronger bodies. That was why she had done it, because war had made her see that George was right by bringing her to a stark realization of the value of the younger, stronger bodies.

Sinclair had evidently reached much the same conclusion, for he was saying something about a whim, no lasting reason——

"I've always cared for Sylvia, but it's hard to forgive her this."

"After all," George said, "Blodgett wasn't her kind. She'd have been unhappy."

In the opaque light Sinclair stared at him.

"Not her kind! No. I suppose he's his own kind."

Temporarily George had driven forth his sympathy. Blodgett, after all, hadn't been above some sharp tricks to win such liking and admiration. Sinclair, of all people, suffering for him!

"I mean," George said, "he'd bought his way, hadn't he, after a fashion, to her side?"

Sinclair continued to stare.

"I don't quite follow. If you mean Josiah's wanted to play with pleasant people—yes, but the only buying he's ever done is with his amazing generosity. He's pulled me for one out of a couple of tight holes after I'd flown straight in the face of his advice. Nothing but a superb good nature could be so forgiving, don't you think?"

George walked on, keeping step with Sinclair, saying nothing more; fighting the old instinct to reach

forward, to grasp Blodgett's hand, to beg his pardon; realizing regretfully, in a sense, that the last support of his jealous contempt had been swept away. He was angry at the blow to his self-conceit. It frightened him to have that attacked. He couldn't put up with it. He would rid himself again of this persistent sympathy for a defeated rival. Just the same, before accepting any more favours from Blodgett, he desired to clasp the pudgy hand.

Betty didn't know any more than Sinclair, nor did she care to talk about the break.

"I can't bear to think of all the happiness torn from that cheerful man."

George studied her face in the light from the windows as they paced up and down the verandah. There was happiness there in spite of the perplexing doubt with which she glanced from time to time at him. There was no question. Betty's kindness had been taken away from him. He tried to be glad for her, but he was sorry for himself, trying to fancy what his life would have been if he had permitted his aim to be turned aside, if he had yielded to the temptation of an unfailing kindness. It had never been in his nature. Why go back over all that?

"One tie's broken," he said, "and another's made. We're no longer the good friends we were, because you haven't told me."

Her white cheeks flooded with colour. She half closed her eyes.

"What, George?"

"That the moon is made of honey. I'm really grateful to Lambert for these few minutes. Don't expect many

more. I can't see you go without a little jealousy, for there have been times when I've wanted you abominably, Betty."

They had reached the end of the verandah and paused there in a light that barely disclosed her wondering smile; her wistful, reminiscent expression.

"It's funny," she said with a little catch in her voice, "to look back on two children. I suppose I felt about the great George Morton as most girls did."

"You flatter me," he said. "Just what do you mean?"

"It's rather tearful one can laugh about such things," she answered. "So long ago! The great athlete's become a soldier!"

"The stable boy's become a slave," he laughed. "Oh, no. Most girls couldn't feel much sentiment about that kind of greatness."

"Hush!" she whispered. "You know the night you told me all that I thought it was a preliminary to your confessing how abominably you wanted me."

"Now, really, Betty——"

"Quite true, George."

"And you ran away."

"And you," she said with a little laugh, "didn't follow."

"Maybe I was afraid of the dragons in the castle. If I'd followed——?"

"We'd have made the dragons angels."

Beneath their jesting he was aware of pain in his

heart, in her eyes; a perception of lost chances, chances that never could have been captured. One couldn't have everything. She had Lambert. He had nothing. But he might have had Betty.

He stooped and pressed his lips to her forehead.

"That's as near as I shall ever come," he thought, sorrowfully, wondering, against his will, if it were true.

"It's to wish you and Lambert happiness," he said aloud.

She raised her fingers to her forehead and let them linger there thoughtfully. She sighed, straightened, spoke.

"I'm no longer a sentimental girl, but the admiration has survived, grown, George. Never forget that."

"And the kindness?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "Why should that ever go?"

But he shook his head.

"All the kindness must be for Lambert. You wouldn't give by halves. When, Betty?"

"Let us walk back. I've left him an extraordinarily long time."

"When?" he repeated.

"I don't know," she answered. "After the war, if he comes home. Of course, he wants it before. Lambert hurries one so."

"It's the war," he said, gravely, "that hurries one."

III

"I've wormed it out of Betty," he said to Lambert on the way back to barracks.

He added congratulations, heartfelt, accompanied by a firm clasp of the hand; but Lambert seemed scarcely to hear, couldn't wait for George to finish before breaking in.

"You and Betty have always been like brother and sister. She says so. I've seen it myself."

George was a trifle uncomfortable.

"What of it?"

"If you get a chance point out to her in your brotherly way that the sooner she marries me the more time we'll have together outside of heaven. I can't very well go at her on that tack. Sounds slushy, but you know there's a good chance of my not coming home, and she insists on waiting."

With all his soul George shrank from such a task. He glanced at the other's long, athletic limbs.

"There are worse fates than widowhood for war brides," he said, brutally.

Lambert made a wry face.

"All the more reason for grabbing what happiness I can."

"Pure selfishness!" George charged him.

"You talk like a fond parent," Lambert answered. "I believe Betty is the only one who doesn't think in those terms. She has other reasons; ridiculous ones.

When she tells them to you you'll come on my side."

"Perhaps," George said, vaguely.

Betty's obstinacy wasn't Lambert's only worry. Several times he opened his mouth as if to speak, and apparently thought better of it. George could guess the sense of those unexpressed phrases, and could understand why Lambert should find it difficult to voice them to him. It wasn't until they were in the sand of the company street, indeed, that Lambert managed to state his difficulty, in whispers, so that the sleeping barracks shouldn't be made restless. George noticed that the other didn't mention Sylvia's name, but it was there in every word, with a sort of apology for her, and a relief that she wasn't after all going to marry one so much older and less graceful than herself.

"I wish you'd suggest a way for me to pull out. I've thought it over. I can't think of any pretty one, but I don't want to be under obligations any longer to a man who has been treated so shabbily."

It amused George to find himself in the position of a Sinclair, fighting with Lambert to spare Blodgett's feelings. For Blodgett, Lambert's proposed action would be the final humiliation.

A day or two later, in fact, Lambert showed George a note he had had from Blodgett.

> "Never let this come up again," a paragraph ran. "If it made any difference between me and the rest of the family I'd feel I'd got more than I deserve. I know I'm not good enough for her. Let it go at that——"

"You're right," Lambert said. "He's entitled to be met just there. I've decided it shall make no difference to the business."

George was relieved, but Lambert, it was clear, resented the situation, blamed it on Sylvia, and couldn't wholly refrain from expressing his disapproval.

"No necessity for it in the first place. Can't see why she picked him, why she does a lot of things."

"Spoiled!" George offered with a happy grin.

"Prefer to say that myself," Lambert grunted, "although God knows I'm beginning to think it's true enough."

IV

George doubted if he would see Sylvia at Plattsburgh at all, so frequently was her visit postponed. Perhaps she preferred to cloister herself really now, experiencing a sense of shame for the blow circumstances had made her strike at one who had never quite earned it; yet when she came, just before the end of camp, he detected no self-consciousness that he could trace to Blodgett. Lambert and he arrived at the hotel late one Saturday afternoon and saw her on the terrace with her mother and the Alstons. For weeks George had forecasted this moment, their first meeting since she had bought back her freedom at the expense of Blodgett's heart; and it disappointed him, startled him; for she was—he had never fancied that would hurt—too friendly. For the first time in their acquaintance she offered her hand willingly and smiled at him; but she had an air of paying a debt. What debt? He caught the

words "Red Cross," "recreation."

"Rather faddish business, isn't it?" he asked, indifferently.

He was still intrigued by Sylvia's manner. A chorus attacked him. Sylvia and Betty, it appeared, were extreme faddists. Only Mrs. Planter smiled at him understandingly from her eminent superiority. As he glanced at his coarse uniform he wanted to laugh, then his temper caught him. The debt she desired to pay was undoubtedly the one owed by a people. He wanted to grasp her and shout in her ear:

"You patriotic idiot! I won't let you insult me that way."

"We have to do what we can," she was saying vehemently. "I wish I were a man. How I wish I were a man!"

If she were a man, he was thinking, he'd pound some sensible judgments into her excited brain. Or was all this simply a nervous reaction from her mental struggles of the past months, from her final escape—a necessary play-acting?

He couldn't manage a word with her alone before dinner. The party wandered through grass-floored forest paths whose shy peace fled from the approach of uniforms and the heavy tramp of army boots. He resented her flood of public questions about his work, his prospects, his mental attitude toward the whole business. Her voice was too kind, her manner too sweet, with just the proper touch of sadness. She wasn't going to spare him anything of the soldier's due. Since he was being fattened, presumably for the butcher, she would turn his thoughts from the knife

———

He longed for the riding crop in her fingers; he would have preferred its blows.

If he got her alone he would put a stop to such intolerable abuse, but the chance escaped him until long after dinner, when the moon swung high above the lake, when the men in uniform and their women were paired in the ballroom, or on the terrace and balconies. He asked her to dance at last and she made no difficulty, giving him that unreal and provoking smile.

"You dance well," she said when the music stopped.

They were near a door. He suggested that they go outside.

"While I tell you that if you offer me any more of that gruel I'll publicly accuse you of treason."

She looked at him puzzled, hesitating.

"What do you mean?"

"When it comes to being killed," he answered, "I prefer the Huns to empty kindness. It's rather more useful for the country, too. Please come out."

She shook her head. Her eyes were a little uncertain.

"Yes, you will," he said. "You've let yourself in for it. I'm the victim of one of your war charities. Let me tell you that sort of thing leads from the dance floor to less public places. After all, the balcony isn't very secluded. If you called for help it would come promiscuously, immediately."

She laughed. She tried to edge toward her mother.

He stopped her.

"Be consistent. Don't refuse a dying man," he sneered.

"Dying man!" she echoed.

"You've impressed me with it all evening. For the first time in your life you've tried to treat me like a human being, and you've succeeded in making me feel a perfect fool. Where's the pamphlet you've been reciting from? I'll guarantee it says the next move is to go to the balcony and be very nice and a little sentimental to the poor devil."

Her head went up. She walked out at his side. He arranged chairs close together at the railing where they seemed to sit suspended in limitless emptiness above the lake and the mountains flattened by the moonlight. Later, under very different circumstances, he was to recall that idea of helpless suspension. She caught it, too, evidently, and gave it a different interpretation. It was as if, engrossed by her own problems, she had for the moment forgotten him.

"This place is so high! It gives you a feeling of freedom."

He knew very well what was in her mind.

"I'm glad you can feel free. I'm glad with all my heart you are free again."

Caught by her sensations she didn't answer at once. He studied her during that brief period when she was, in a fashion, helpless before his eager eyes. Abruptly she faced him, as if the sense of his words had been delayed in reaching her, or, as if, perhaps, his frank regard had drawn her around, a little startled.

"I shall not quarrel with you to-night," she said.

"Good! Then you must let me tell you that while I'm sorry as I can be for poor old Blodgett, I'm inexpressibly glad for you and for this particular object of your charity."

"It does not concern you," she said.

"Enormously. I wonder if you would answer one or two questions quite truthfully."

She stirred uneasily, seemed about to rise, then evidently thought better of it. The orchestra resumed its labours. Many figures near by gravitated toward the ballroom, leaving them, indeed, in something very near seclusion. And she stayed to hear his questions, but she begged him not to ask them.

"You and Lambert are friends. What you are both doing makes me want to think of that, makes me want to make concessions, but don't misunderstand, don't force me to quarrel with you until after this is over."

He paid no attention to her.

"I suppose the war made you realize I was right about Blodgett?"

"You cannot talk about that."

"Has the war shown you I was right about myself?" he went on.

"Are you going to make my good resolutions impossible?" she asked.

Over his shoulder George saw the men in khaki guiding pretty girls about the dance floor. The place

was full of a heady concentration of pleasure that had a beautiful as well as a pitiful side. About him the atmosphere was frankly amorous, compounded of multiple desires of heart and mind which strained for fulfilment before it should be too late. For him Sylvia was a part of it—the greater part. It entered his senses as the delightful and faint perfume which reached him from her. It became ponderable in her dark hair; in her lips half parted; in her graceful pose as she bent toward him attentively; in her sudden movement of withdrawal, as if she had suddenly realized he would never give her her way.

"Isn't it time," he asked, "that you forgot some of your childish pride and bad temper? Sylvia! When are you going to marry me?"

Her laughter wasn't even, but she arose unhurriedly. She paused, indeed, and sank back on the arm of the chair.

"So even now," she said, "it's to be quarrels or nothing."

"Or everything," he corrected her. "I shall make you realize it somehow, some day. What's the use putting it off? Let's forget the ugly part of the past. Marry me before I go to France."

He was asking her what he had accused Lambert of unjustifiably wanting Betty to do. All at once he understood Lambert's haste. He stretched out his hand to Sylvia. He meant it—with all his heart he meant it, but she answered him scornfully:

"Is that your way of saying you love me?"

The bitterness of many years revived in his mind, focusing on that question. If he should answer it

impulsively she would be in a position to hurt him more than she had ever done. George Morton didn't dare take chances with his impulses, and the bitterness was in his voice when he answered:

"You've never let me fancy myself at your feet in a sentimental fit."

But it was difficult for him not to assume such an attitude: not to take her hand, both of her hands; not to draw her close.

"If you'd only answer me——" he began.

She stood up.

"Just as when I first saw you!" she cried, angrily.

She controlled herself.

"You shan't force me to quarrel. Come in. Let us dance once."

In a sense he put himself at her feet then.

"I'm afraid to dance with you to-night," he whispered.

She looked at him, her eyes full of curiosity. Her eyes wavered. She turned and started across the gallery. In a panic he sprang after her.

"All right. Let us dance," he said.

He led her to the floor and took her in his arms, but he had an impression of guiding an automaton about the room. Almost at once she asked him to stop by the door leading to the gallery. He looked at her questioningly. Her distaste for the civilian Morton was undisguised at last from the soldier Morton. But there was more than that to be read in her colourful face—self-distaste, perhaps; and a sort of fright,

comparable with the panic George had just now experienced on the verandah. Her voice was tired.

"I've done my best. I can't keep it up."

"No more war kindness!" he said. "Good!"

He watched her, her draperies arranging themselves in perplexingly graceful folds, as she hurried with an air of flight away from him along the gallery.

V

The evening the commissions were awarded George appreciated the ingratitudes and cruelties of service rather more keenly than he had done even as a youngster at Oakmont.

"It's like tap day at New Haven," Lambert said, nervously.

He had paused for a moment to compare notes with George. He hurried now to his own organization for fear something might have happened during his absence. The suspense increased, reaching even George, who all along had been confident of success.

In the dusk the entire company crowded the narrow space between the barracks—scores of men who had been urged by passionate politicians to abandon family, money, everything, for the discomforts, sometimes the degradations, of this place, for the possible privilege of dying for a cause. It had had to be done, but in the hearts of many that night was the fancy that it might have been done rather differently. It was clear, for instance, that the passionate and patriotic politicians hadn't troubled to tear from a reluctant general staff enough commissions for the size and quality of these first camps. Many of the men, therefore, who with a sort of terror shuffled their feet in the sand, would be sent home, to the draft, or to the questioning scorn of their friends, under suspicion of a form of treason, of not having banged the drum quite hard enough. And it wasn't that at all.

George, like everyone else, had known for a long time there wouldn't be enough commissions to go

around. Why, he wondered now, had the fellows chosen for dismissal been held for this public announcement of failure. And in many cases, he reflected, there was no failure here beyond the insolvency of a system. Among those who would go back to the world with averted faces were numbers who hadn't really come at all within the vision of their instructors, beyond whom they could not appeal. And within a year this same reluctant army would be reaching out eagerly for inferior officer material. And these men would not forget. You could never expect them to forget.

Two messengers emerged from the orderly room and commenced to thread the restless, apprehensive groups, seeking, with a torturing slowness finding candidates to whom they whispered. The chosen ran to the orderly room, entered there, according to instructions, or else formed a long line outside the window where sat the supreme arbiter, the giver, in a way of life and death, the young fellow from West Point.

Men patted George on the back.

"You'll go among the first, George."

But he didn't. He paced up and down, watching the many who waited for the whisper which was withheld, waited until they knew it wouldn't come, expressed then in their faces thoughts blacker than the closing night, entered at last into the gloomy barracks where they sat on their bunks silently and with bowed heads.

Was that fate, through some miracle of mismanagement, reserved for him? It couldn't be. The fellow had seen him at the start. George had

forced himself to get along with him, to impress him. Somebody touched George on the arm. A curiously intense whisper filled his ear.

"You're wanted in the orderly room, Morton."

In leaving the defeated he had an impression of a difficult and sorrowful severance.

In the orderly room too many men rubbed shoulders restlessly. A relieved sigh went up. It was as if everyone had known nothing vital could occur before his arrival. The young West Pointer was making the most of his moment. The war wasn't likely to bring him another half so great.

Washington, he announced, had cut down the number of higher commissions he had asked for.

George's name was read among the first.

"To be captain of infantry, United States Reserve—George Morton."

There was something very like affection in the West Pointer's voice.

"I recommended you for a majority, Mr. Morton. Stick to the job as you have here, and it will come along."

Lambert and Goodhue found him as he crowded with the rest through the little door. They had kept their captaincies. Even Goodhue released a little of his relief at the outcome.

"Any number busted—no time to find out whether they were good or bad."

The dark, hot, sandy street was full of shadowy

figures, calling, shouting, laughing neurotically.

"Good fellow, but I had you on my list." "My Lord! I never expected more than a private in the rear rank." "What do you think of Blank? Lost out entirely." "Rotten deal." "Not the only one by several dozens." "Hear about Doe? Wouldn't have picked him for a shave tail. Got a captaincy. Teacher's pet."

Brutally someone had turned on the barrack lights. Through the windows the successful ones could see among the bunks the bowed and silent figures, must have known how sacrilegious it was to project their happiness into this place which had all at once become a sepulchre of dead sacrifices.

"I hope," George muttered to his friends, "I'll never have to see quite so much suffering on a battlefield."

VI

It wasn't pleasant to face Blodgett, but it had to be done, for all three of the partners had determined out of necessity to spend the greater portion of their leaves at the office. George slipped in alone the morning he got back to New York. Blodgett looked up as if he had been struck, taking in each detail of the uniform and its insignia, symbols of success. The face seemed a little less round, infinitely less contented. Sitting back there in his office he had an air of having sought a corner. If Sylvia didn't, he clearly appreciated the shame of the situation. George took the pudgy hand and pressed it, but he couldn't say anything and Blodgett seemed to understand and be grateful. He failed, however, to hide his envy of the uniform.

"I'd give my money and something besides," he said,

"to be able to climb into that."

"You're lucky you can't," George answered, half meaning it.

As a substitute Blodgett spoke of some dollar-a-year work in Washington.

"But don't worry, George. I'll see everything here is looked after."

George was glad Blodgett had so much to take care of, for it was clear that the more work he had the better off he would be. In Blodgett's presence he tried not to think of Sylvia and his own intentions. He wrote her, for the first time, boldly asking, since he couldn't suggest such a visit to Lambert, if he might see her at Oakmont. She didn't keep him in suspense. He smiled as he read her brief reply, it had been so obviously dictated by the Sylvia who was going to be good to soldiers no matter how dreadful the cost.

> "I thought I made you understand that what you proposed at Plattsburgh can never become less preposterous; my response less determined. So of course it wouldn't do for you to come. When we see each other, as we're bound to do, before you sail, I shall try to forget the absolute lack of any even merely friendly ground between us. It would hurt Lambert——"

"Damn Lambert!" he muttered.

But he didn't tear her letter up. He put it in the pocket of his blouse. He continued to carry it there.

Instead of going to Oakmont, consequently, he spent a Sunday at Princeton, vastly amused at the pacifist Bailly. Minute by minute the attenuated tutor cursed his inability to take up a gun and pop at Germans, interspersing his regrets with:

"But of course war is dreadful. It is inconceivable in a healthy brain——" and so forth.

He had found a substitute for his chief ambition. He was throwing himself heart and soul into the efforts of the Y.M.C.A. to keep soldiers amused and fed.

"For Princeton," he explained, "has become an armed camp, a mill to manufacture officers; nothing more. The classics are as defunct as Homer. I had almost made a bad pun by suggesting that of them all Martial alone survives."

Before he left, George was sorry he had come, for Lambert took pains to leave Betty alone with him as they walked Sunday evening by the lake. More powerful than Lambert's wishes in his mind was the memory of how Betty and he had skated here, or come to boat races, or walked like this in his undergraduate days; and she didn't take kindly to his interference, letting him see that to her mind a marriage with Lambert now would be too eager a jump into the house of Planter; too inconsiderate a request for the key to the Planter coffers.

"For Lambert may not come back," she said.

"That's just it," he urged, unwillingly. "Why not take what you can be sure of?"

"What difference would it make?" she asked. "Would I love Lambert any more? Would he love me any more?"

"I think so," he said.

She shook her head.

"But the thought of a wife might make a difference at the front; might make him hesitate, or give a little less. We all have to give everything. So I give Lambert—entirely—if I have to."

George didn't try to say any more, for he knew she was right; yet with the opening of Camp Upton and the birth of the division the rather abrupt marriages of soldiers multiplied. During the winter Officers' House sheltered excited conferences that led to Riverhead where licenses, clergymen, and justices of the peace could be found; and there was scarcely a week-end that didn't see the culmination in town of a romance among George's own friends and acquaintances.

The week-ends he got were chiefly valuable to him because they offered chances of seeing Sylvia. Few actually developed, however, for there were not many general parties, since men preferred to cling, not publicly, during such brief respites to those they loved and were on the point of quitting.

The Alstons had taken a house for the winter, and George caught her there once or twice, and would rather not have seen her at all, she was so painfully cordial, so bound up in her war work of which he felt himself the chief victim. He began to fear that he would not see her alone again before he sailed; that he might never be with her alone again.

He didn't care either for the pride she took in Dalrymple's presence at the second camp.

"He's sure to do well," she would say. "He's always

had all sorts of possibilities. Watch the war bring them out."

Why did women like the man? There was no question that they did. They talked now, in ancient terms, of his permanent exit from the field of wild oats. He could be so fascinating, so thoughtful—of women. But men didn't like him. Dalrymple's fascinating ways had caught them too frequently, too expensively. And George didn't believe in his reform, saw symptoms, as others did, of its true value when, at the close of the second camp, Dalrymple got himself assigned to the trains of the division. It was rumoured he had left Plattsburgh a second lieutenant. It was fact that he appeared at Upton a captain. Secret intrigues in Washington by fond parents, men whispered; but the women didn't seem to care, for Dalrymple hadn't shown himself before any of them carrying less than the double silver bars of a captain.

George received his prophesied majority at the moment of this disagreeable arrival. That did impress Sylvia to the point of making her more cordial in public, more careful than before not to give him a word in private. As the day of departure approached he grew increasingly restless. He had never experienced a sensation of such complete helplessness. He was bound by Upton. She could stand aside and mock him with her studied politenesses.

Blodgett ran down a number of times, to sit in George's quarters, working with the three partners over figures. They made tentative lists of what should be sold at the first real whisper of peace.

"But there'll be no peace for a long time," Blodgett

promised. "There's a lot of money for you boys in this war yet."

They laughed at him, and he looked a little hurt, apparently unable to see anything humorous in his cheerful promise.

Dalrymple was aware of these conferences, for he was frequently about the regimental area. George wasn't surprised, when he sat alone one night, to hear a tap on his window pane, to see Dalrymple's face at the window.

"Hesitate to disturb a major, and all that," Dalrymple said as he entered. "Two rooms. You're lucky."

"Not luck; work," George said, shortly. "What is it? Didn't come here to envy my rank, did you?"

Although he was in far better shape nervously and physically than he had been that day in George's office, Dalrymple bore himself with much the same confused and hesitant manner. It recalled to George the existence of the note which the other had made no effort to redeem.

"You know," Dalrymple began, vaguely, "there's a lot of—what do you call it—bunk—about this hurrah for the dear old soldier business. Fact is, the more chance there is of a man's getting blown up the nastier some people become."

George laughed shortly.

"You mean when you owe them money."

"As Driggs used to say," Dalrymple answered, "'you're a very penetrating person.'"

He hesitated, then went on with an increasing

difficulty:

"You're one of the people I owe money to."

Wandel had taken George's hint, evidently. George was sorry he had ever let it drop. But was he? Mightn't it be as well in the end? In spite of all this talk of people's leaving their bones in France, there was a fair chance that both Dalrymple and he would bring theirs, unaltered, back to America.

"Don't worry," George said. "I shan't press you."

"Handsome enough," Dalrymple thanked him in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "But everybody isn't that decent. It's this talk of the division sailing that's turned them nasty."

George fingered a pamphlet about poison gases. He didn't much blame debtors for turning nasty.

"You want to borrow some more money from me," he said.

Dalrymple's face lightened.

"If you'd be that good; but it's a lot."

"Why," George asked, quietly, "don't you go to someone you're closer to?"

Dalrymple flushed. He wouldn't meet George's eyes.

"Dicky would give it me," he said, "but I can't ask him; I've made him too many promises. So would Lambert, but it would be absurd for me to go to him."

"Why absurd?" George asked, quietly.

"Wholly impossible," was all Dalrymple would say.

"Quite absurd."

There came back to George his ugly sensations at Blodgett's, and he knew he would give Dalrymple a lot of money now, as he had given him a little then, and for precisely the same reason.

"I'm afraid I've been a bit hard on my friends," Dalrymple admitted. "As a rule they've dried up."

"So you come to one who isn't a friend?" George asked.

"Now see here, Morton, that's scarcely fair."

"You haven't forgotten that day in my office," George accused him, "when you made a brutal ass of yourself."

"Said I was sorry. Don't you ever forget anything?"

Dalrymple was angry enough himself now, but his worry apparently forced him on.

"I wouldn't have come to you at all, only Driggs said —and you said yourself once, and you can spare it. I know that. See here. Unless somebody helps me these people will go to Division Headquarters or Washington. They'll stop my sailing. They'll——"

"Don't cry," George interrupted. "You want money, and you don't give a hang where it comes from. That's it, isn't it?"

"I have to have money," Dalrymple acknowledged.

"Then you ought to have sense enough to know the only reason I'd give it to you. Do you think I'd care if they held you in this country for your silly debts? What you borrow you have to pay back in one way

or another. Don't make any mistake. If I give you money it's to be able to make you pay as I please. You've always had a knife out for me. I don't mind putting one in my own hands. If you want money on those terms come to my office with your accounts Saturday afternoon. We'll see what can be done."

Dalrymple was quite white. He moistened his lips. As he left he muttered:

"I can't answer back. I have to have money. You've got me where you want."

VII

Dalrymple's necessities turned out to be greater than George had imagined. They measured pretty accurately the extent of his reformation. George got several notes to run a year in return for approximately twenty thousand dollars.

"Remember," he said at the close of the transaction, "you pay those back when and how I say."

"I wouldn't have come to you if I could have helped it," Dalrymple whined. "But don't forget, Morton, somebody will pull me out at a pinch. I'm going to work to pay you if I live. I'm through with nonsense. Give me a chance."

George nodded him out, and sent for his lawyer. In case of his death Dalrymple's notes would go back to the man. Everything else he had divided between his mother and the Baillys. He wrote his mother a long letter, telling her just what to do. Quite honestly he regretted his inability to get West to say good-bye. The thought of bringing her to New York or Upton had not occurred to him.

For during these days of farewells everyone flocked to Upton, sitting about the hostess houses all day and evening for an occasional chat with their hurried men. Then they let such moments slip by because of a feeling of strangeness, of dumb despair.

The Alstons and the Baillys were there, and so, of course, was Sylvia, with her mother, more minutely guarded than she had ever been. His few glimpses of her at luncheon or supper at Officers' House increased the evil humour into which Dalrymple had thrown him. Consequently he looked at her, impressing upon his morose mind each detail of her beauty that he knew very well he might never study again. The old depression of complete failure held him. She was going to let him go without a word. Even this exceptional crisis was without effect upon her intolerant memory. He would leave her behind to complete a destiny which he, perhaps, after all, had affected only a very little.

With the whispered word that there would be no more meetings at Officers' House, that before dawn the regiment would have slipped from Upton, George turned to his packing with the emotions of a violently constricted animal. He wouldn't even see her again. When Lambert came to confer with him about some final dispositions he watched him like such an animal, but Lambert let him see that he, too, was at a loss. He had sent word by an orderly that he couldn't get to Officers' House that evening.

"I couldn't make it any plainer. If they've any sense they'll know and hunt me up."

They were wise, and a little of George's strain relaxed, for they found Lambert in his quarters, and they made it clear that they had come to say good-

bye to George, too. After many halting efforts they gave up trying to express themselves.

"The Spartans were better at this sort of thing," Bailly said at the last as he clasped George's hand.

"Every Hun I kill or capture, sir, I'll think of as your Hun."

Without words, without tears, Mrs. Bailly kissed his lips. George tried to laugh.

Betty wouldn't say good-bye, wouldn't even shake hands.

"I shan't think of killing," she said. "Just take care of yourselves, and come back."

George stared at her, alarmed. He had never seen her so white. Lambert followed her from the room. The Baillys went out after them. Why did Mrs. Planter linger? There she stood near the door, looking at George without the slightest betrayal of feeling. He had an impression she was going to say:

"We've really quite enjoyed Upton."

At least she held Sylvia a moment longer, Sylvia who had said nothing, who had not met his eyes, who had seemed from the first anxious to escape from this plank room littered with the paraphernalia of battle. Mrs. Planter held out her hand, smiling.

"Good-bye, Major. One doesn't need to wish you success. You inspire confidence."

He was surprised at the strength of her white hand, felt it draw him closer, watched her bend her head, heard her speak in his ear so low that Sylvia couldn't hear—a whisper intense, agonized, of a quality that

seemed like a white-hot iron in his brain:

"Take care of my son. Bring him back to me."

She straightened, releasing his hand.

"Come, Sylvia," she said, pleasantly.

Without looking back she went out.

"Good luck, Major," Sylvia said, and prepared to follow.

Quickly George reached out, caught her arm, and drew her away from the door.

"You're not going to say good-bye like this."

In her effort to escape, in her flushed face, in her angry eyes, he read her understanding that no other man she knew could have done just this, that it was George Morton's way. Why not? He had no time for veneer now. It was his moment, probably his last with her.

With her free hand she reached behind her to steady herself against the table. Her fingers touched the gas mask that lay there, then stiffened and moved away. Some of the colour left her face. Her arm became passive in his grasp.

"Let me go. How do you want me to say good-bye?"

He caught her other arm.

"Give me something to take. Oh, God, Sylvia! Let me have my kiss."

VIII

Never since he had walked out of the great gate with

Sylvia's dog at his heels to a wilful tutoring of his body and brain had George yielded to such untrammelled emotion, to so unbounded a desire. This moment of parting, in which he had felt himself helpless, had swept it all away—the carefully applied manner, the solicitous schooling of an impulsive brain, the minute effort to resemble the class of which he had imagined himself a part. Temporarily he was back at the starting point, the George Morton who had lifted Sylvia in his arms, blurting out impossible words, staring at her lips with an abrupt and narrow realization that sooner or later he would have to touch them.

Sylvia's quick action brought some of it back, but he had no remorse, no feeling of reversion, for the moment itself was naked, inimical to masquerade.

"Lambert!" she called.

Her voice didn't suggest fright or too sharp a hurry. Looking at her face he could understand how much her control had cost, for her expression was that of the girl Sylvia, filled with antipathy, abhorrence, an inability to believe. It appeared to tell him that if he had ever advanced toward her at all, he had just now forced himself back to his own side of the vast space dividing them.

"Don't be a fool," he whispered. "I could take it, but you have to give."

Her lips were pressed tight as if in a defence against the possible approach of his. They both heard a quick step outside. He let her arms go, and turned to the door where Dalrymple stood, unquestionably good to look upon in his uniform. He frowned at this picture which might have suggested to him a real

intimacy between George Morton and Sylvia Planter.

"Lambert's gone on with Betty and the others. What's up?"

Sylvia's voice wasn't quite steady.

"The Major can't leave the area. I want somebody to take me to Officers' House."

George nodded. He had quite recovered his control, and he knew he had failed, that there was nothing more to be done. The thought of the doubtful days ahead was like a great burden on his soul.

"I've one more word for the Major," she said at the door, motioning Dalrymple on.

George went close to her.

"It's only this," she said. "I'm sorry it had to come at the last minute."

He laughed shortly.

"It was the last minute that made it. I'm not sorry."

Her face twisted passionately, as if she were on the point of angry tears.

"I hope I shall never see you again. Do you understand that?"

"Quite," he said, dryly. "To George on going to the wars!"

"I didn't mean just that," she cried, angrily.

"It's your only chance," he said, "and I can understand how you can wish I shouldn't come back."

"I didn't mean it," she repeated.

"Don't count too heavily on it," he went on. "I can't imagine dying before having had what I have always wanted, have always sooner or later intended to get. If I come back I shall have it."

Without another word she turned and left him. He watched her walk side by side with Dalrymple out of the area.

IX

There were moments on the voyage, in the training area in Flanders, even at the front, when he was sorry he had tried to take something of Sylvia with him to battle; for, as it was, he had of her nothing whatever except a wish that she should never see him again. There was a deep irony, consequently, in his official relations with her brother, for it was Lambert who saluted him, who addressed him perpetually as "sir," who wanted to know if the major would approve of this, that, or the other. It was grotesque. He wanted to cry aloud against this necessary servility of a man whose sister couldn't abide the inferiority of its object.

And he hated war, its waste, its bad management, its discomforts, its dangers. Was it really true he had involved himself in this filth because of Sylvia? Then that was funny. By gad, he would see her again! But he watched his chances dwindle.

While the battalion was in reserve in Lorraine Lambert and he ran into Dalrymple at the officers' club beneath division headquarters in Baccarat. George saw him first.

"The intrepid warrior takes his ease," he muttered.

Dalrymple left three staff men he was with and hurried across the room.

"New York must be a lonesome place," he said. "Everybody here. Had a letter from Sylvia, Lambert."

Why should she write to him? Far from women's eyes he was back at it. One of the staff men, in fact, wandered over and whispered to George.

"Either you chaps from the trains? Somebody ought to take him to his billet. General or chief-of-staff might drift through. Believe he'd slap 'em on the shoulder."

"Not a bad idea," George said, contemptuously.

Dalrymple didn't even try to be cordial to him, knowing George wasn't likely to make trouble as long as they were in France. Lambert took care of him, steered him home, and a few days later told George with surprised laughter that the man had been transferred to a showy and perfectly safe job at G.H.Q.

"Papa, and mama, and Washington!" Lambert laughed.

"Splendid thing for the war," George sneered.

But he raved with Lambert when Goodhue was snatched away by a general who chose his aides for their names and social attainments.

"Spirit's all through the army," Goodhue complained, bitterly. "Why doesn't it occur to them to get the right men for the right places?"

He sighed.

"Suppose we'll get through somehow, but there'll be too much mourning sold at home."

All along that had been in George's mind, and, in his small way, he did what he could, studying minutely methods of accomplishing his missions at the minimum cost to his battalion; but on the Vesle he grew discouraged, seeing his men fall not to rise; or to be lifted to a stretcher; or to scramble up and stagger back swathed with first-aid rolls, dodging shells and machine-gun spirts; or, and in some ways that was hardest of all to watch, to be led by some bandaged ones, blinded and vomiting from gas.

He had no consecutive sleep. He never got his clothes off. He snatched food from a tin can. He suffered from the universal dysentery. He was under constant fire. He lay in shallow funk holes, conferring with his company and platoon commanders. At best he sat in the cellar of a smashed house, poring, by the light of a candle, over maps and complicated orders. Most of the time he wore a gas mask which had the advantage, however, of shutting out the stifling odour of decay. He never had time to find out if he was afraid. He reached a blessed state of indifference where getting hit appeared an inevitable and restful prospect.

Driggs Wandel arrived surprisingly on the day the Germans were falling back to the Aisne, at a moment when most of the artillery fire was coming from the American side, when it was possible to sit on a sunny bank outside the battalion dugout breathing only stale souvenirs of last night's gas shells.

"*Bon jour*, most powerful and disreputable of majors!"

George held out his hand.

"Bring any chocolate, Driggs? Sit down, you idiot. Jerry's never seen such a nice new uniform."

Suddenly he lost his temper. Why the devil couldn't he get some pleasure out of this extraordinary reunion? Why did he have to greet Wandel as if he had seen him daily since their parting more than three years ago on a dusky pier in New York? He had heard that Wandel, with the declaration of war, had left the ambulance for a commission in the field artillery. He saw him now wearing the insignia of a general staff major.

"Just attached to your corps headquarters," Wandel said. "Didn't want the job, would rather have been a fighting man with my pretty guns. Suppose some fool of a friend of the family brought the usual influence without consulting me."

"Glad to see you, Driggs," George muttered, "although I don't seem able to tell you so. How did you get here?"

"Guide from regimental headquarters. Wanted to see how the submerged heroes live. Nasty, noisy, smelly spot to be heroic in."

"A picnic to-day."

"I've always suspected," Wandel said, "that picnics were unhealthy."

"Better have come," George grinned, "any other day we've been here the past few weeks."

Wandel laughed.

"Don't think I didn't pick my day. The general staff

takes no unnecessary risks. Tell me, my George, when did you shave last? When did you wash your pretty face last? When did you take your swank clothes off last?"

"I think when I was a very little boy," George sighed.

Wandel became abruptly serious, turned so, perhaps, by a large shell fragment, still warm, which he had picked up. As he fingered it he stared at George.

"I know," George said, "that I point a moral, but even little boys would be glad to be made clean if they got like this. Don't rub it in."

"To the contrary," Wandel said, thoughtfully, "I'm going back over a lot of years. I'm remembering how that most extraordinary man, Freshman George Morton, looked. I'm thinking that I've always been right about you."

The warm sun, the diminution of racket, this sudden companionship, had drawn George a little from his indifferent, half-dazed condition. He, too, could look back, and without discomfort. On the Vesle it was only death that counted. Birth didn't amount to a hill of beans, or money, or education, except in that it made a man an officer. So George answered frankly:

"All along you've guessed a lot about me, Driggs."

"Known, George."

"Would you mind telling me how?"

"It would be a pleasure to point out to you," Wandel drawled, "that a lot of people aren't half as big fools as you've credited them with being. You looked a little what you were at first. You've probably forgotten that when you matriculated you put down

a place of residence, a record easily available for one who saw, as I did, means of using you. Even a fool could have guessed something was up the night Betty was good enough to make herself a part of the *beau monde*. I gathered a lot from Lambert then."

"Yet," George said, almost indifferently, "you went on being a friend."

"Your political manager, George," Wandel corrected. "I'm not sure it would have gone much further if it hadn't been for Dicky."

George was thoroughly aroused at last.

"Did Dicky know?"

"Not mere facts," Wandel answered. "What difference did they make? But he could see what you had started from, how great the climb you were taking. That's why he liked and admired you, because of what you were, not because of what you wanted people to think you were. That's really what first attracted me to you, and it amused me to see you fancying you were getting away with so much more than you really were."

"Extraordinary!" George managed. "Then the heights are not so well guarded?"

"Ah, yes—guarded," Wandel said, "but not against great men."

George kicked at the ground with his heel.

"Funny how unimportant it all seems here," he muttered.

It wasn't only the surroundings that made it seem unimportant; it was his remembrance of Sylvia who

had known more than Wandel, more than anybody, yet had never opened the gate.

"You've taken all my conceit away," he went on. "Once it might have made me want to put myself out. Now I'm quite content to let Jerry do it."

Wandel's voice warmed, was less affected than George had ever heard it.

"What are you talking about? You've won a great victory. You should carry laurels on your brow. You've climbed to the top. You've defined for us all a possible socialism."

George smiled.

"A hell of a thing to talk about here! But tell that to Squibs, will you, little man, when you get back? We've had some rare battles over it."

Wandel hurried on.

"You've made yourself one of us, if it's any satisfaction. You're as good as the best of us—of the inheritors."

George folded his arms on his knees and bowed his head. Wandel's voice was startled.

"What's up?"

"Maybe I'm crying," George mumbled. "Ought to be, because I'm so filthy tired, and I know you're wrong, Driggs. I'm rotten inside. I haven't even started to climb."

But when he looked up there were no tears in his eyes, and his dirty face had altered with its old whimsical smile.

"Besides, it's enough to make me cry to know you wouldn't say all this unless you were certain I'm going to be killed."

"Hope not," Wandel laughed, "but picnics are full of germs. What's this?"

A grimy figure approached like a man fantastically imitating some animal. His route was devious as if he were perpetually dodging something that miraculously failed to materialize. He stopped, straightened reluctantly, and saluted George.

"Captain sent me on, sir. I've located Jerry opposite at——"

He rattled off some coordinates. George looked him over.

"How did you find that out?" he snapped.

"Ran across Jerry——"

The dirty young man recited jerkily and selflessly a story of fear and risks overcome, of cunning stealth, of passionate and promiscuous murder——

"Report back," George said.

When he had gone George called for his adjutant and turned to Wandel.

"Before anything happens to me," he said, "I'll recommend that dirty young assassin for a citation."

Wandel laughed in a satisfied way.

"I'm always right about you, great man. Don't you see that? Never think about your own citation——"

George stared at him, uncomprehending.

"Citation! A thousand citations for a bed!"

He watched Wandel uneasily when, at the heels of a guide, he dodged down the slope in search of Lambert, calling back:

"Don't swallow any germs."

"That's very fine, Driggs," he thought, "but why all that and not the rest? I'd give a good deal to guess what you know about me and Sylvia Planter."

X

George hoped Wandel would find Lambert. Day by day he had dreaded bad news. Other officers and men got hit every hour; why not himself or Lambert? For he had never forgotten Mrs. Planter's unexpected and revealing whisper. It had shown him that even beneath such exteriors emotion lurks as raw, as desirous, as violent as a savage's. The rest, then, was habit which people inherited, or acquired, or imitated with varying success. It had made him admire her all the more, had forced on him a wish to obey her, but what could he do? It was not in him to play favourites. One man's life was as good as another's; but he watched Lambert as he could, while in his tired brain lingered a feeling of fear for that woman's son.

During the peaceful days dividing the Aisne and the Argonne he looked at Lambert and fingered his own clothing, stained and torn where death had nearly reached, with a wondering doubt that they could both be whole, that Mrs. Planter in her unemotional way could still welcome guests to Oakmont. And he recalled that impression he had shared with Sylvia on the bluff above Lake Champlain of being

suspended, but he no longer felt free. He seemed to hang, indeed, helplessly, in a resounding silence which at any moment would commence giving forth unbearable, Gargantuan noises; for, bathed and comfortable, eating in leisure from a mess-kit, he never forgot that this was a respite, that to-morrow or the next day or the day after the sounding board would reverberate again, holding him a deafened victim.

Wandel caught up with them one evening in the sylvan peace that preceded the fatal forest uproar. The Argonne still slumbered; was nearly silent; offered untouched trees under which to loaf after a palatable cold supper. The brown figures of enlisted men also lounged near by, reminiscing, wondering, doubtless, as these officers did, about New York which had assumed the attributes of an unattainable paradise.

George hadn't been particularly pleased to see Wandel. What Wandel knew made more difference in this quiet place, and George had a vague, shamed recollection of having accused himself of being rotten inside, of not having even started to climb.

"Must have had a touch of shell shock without knowing it," he mused as he stared through the dusk at the precise, clean little man.

Indifferently he listened to Lambert's good-natured raillery at the general staff, then he focussed his attention, for Lambert's voice had suddenly turned serious, his hand had indicated the lounging figures of the enlisted men.

"With all your ridiculous fuss and feathers at nice headquarters châteaux, I don't suppose you ever get

to know those fellows, Driggs."

"I don't see why not," Wandel drawled.

"Do you love them, everyone?"

"Can't say that I do, but then my heart is only a small organ."

"I do," Lambert said, warmly. "And you'll find George does. You can't help it when you see them pulling through this thing. They're real men, aren't they, George?"

George yawned.

"Are they any more so," he asked, dryly, "than they were when they lived in the same little town with you? I mean, if all you say about them is true why did you have to wait for war to introduce you to unveil their admirable qualities?"

Lambert straightened.

"It's wrong," he said, defiantly, "that I should have waited. It's wrong that I couldn't help myself."

"And you once tried to take a horse whip to me," George whispered in his ear.

It was Lambert's absurd earnestness that worried him. Did Lambert, too, have a touch of shell shock? Wandel was trying to smooth out his doubts.

"I think what you mean to say is that war, aside from military rank, is a great leveller. We can leave that out altogether. You know the professional officer's creed: 'Good Colonel, deliver us.' 'We beseech ye to hear us, good General,' and so on up to the top man, who begs the Secretary of War, who prays to the

President, who, one ventures to hope, gets a word to God. You mean, Lambert, that out here it never occurs to you to ask these men who their fathers were, or what preps they went to, or what clubs they're members of. It's the war spirit—aside from military rank—this sham equality. Titled ladies dine with embarrassed Tommies. Your own sister dances with doughboys who'd be a lot happier if she'd leave them alone. It's in the air, beautiful, gorgeous, hysterical war democracy which declares that all men are equal until they're wounded; then they're superior; or until they're dead; then they're forgotten."

George grunted.

"You're right, Driggs. It won't survive the war."

"Paper work!" Wandel sneered.

"It ought to last!" Lambert cried. "I hope it does."

"Pray that it doesn't," Wandel said. "I fancy the real hell of war comes after the war is over. We'll find that out, if we live. As for me, even now when we're all beloved brothers, I'd give a good deal to be sitting in a Fifth Avenue club looking out on lesser men."

"I would, too," George said, fervently.

Lambert spoke with abysmal seriousness.

"I'd rather have some of the splendid lesser men sitting on the same side of the window with me."

George stared at him. What had happened to this aristocrat who had once made a medieval gesture with a horse whip? Certainly he, the plebeian victim of that attack, had no such wish. Put these men on the same side of a club window, or a factory

window, for that matter, and they'd drag the whole business down to their level, to eternal smash fast enough. Why, hang Lambert! It amounted to visualizing his sister as a slattern. He smiled with a curious pride. Reddest revolution couldn't make her that. She wouldn't come down off her high horse if a dozen bayonets were at her throat. What the deuce was he thinking about? Why should he be proud of that? For, if he lived, he was going to drag her off himself, but he wouldn't make her a slattern.

"You talk like Allen," he said, "and you haven't even his excuse."

"I've seen the primeval for the first time," Lambert answered.

"I'll admit it has qualities," Wandel yawned. "Anyway, I'm off."

Mrs. Planter came back to George's mind, momentarily as primeval as a man surrendered to the battle lust. What one saw, except in self-destructive emergencies, he told himself, was all veneer. Ages, epochs, generations, merely determined its depth. The hell after war! Did Wandel mean there was danger then of an attempt to thin the veneer? Was Lambert, of all people, going to assist the Allens to plane it away?

"It would mean another dark ages," he mused.

His own little self-imposed coat he saw now had gone on top of a far thicker one without which he would have been as helpless as a bushman or some anthropoidal creature escaped from an unexplored country.

He laughed, but uncomfortably. Those two had made

him uneasy, and Squibs, naturally, was at Lambert's folly. There had been a letter a day or two ago which he had scarcely had time to read because of the demands of an extended movement and the confusion of receiving replacements and re-equipping the men he had. He read it over now. "Understanding," "Brotherhood."

"You are helping to bring it about, because you are helping to win this war."

In a fit of irritation he tore the letter up. What the devil was he fighting the war for?

The question wouldn't let him asleep. Lambert, Wandel, and Squibs between them had made him for the first time in his life thoroughly, uncomfortably, abominably afraid—physically afraid—afraid of being killed. For all at once there was more than Sylvia to make him want to live. He didn't see how he could die without knowing what the deuce he was fighting this man's war for, anyway.

XI

He hadn't learned any more about it when Lambert and he were caught on the same afternoon a week later.

In the interminable, haggard thicket the attack had abruptly halted. Word reached George that Lambert's company was falling back. To him that was beyond belief if Lambert was still with his men. He hurried forward before regimental headquarters had had a chance to open its distant mouth. There were machine-gun nests ahead, foolish stragglers told him. Of course. Those were what he had ordered Lambert to take. The company was disorganized. Little groups

slunk back, dragging their rifles as if they were too heavy. Others squatted in the underbrush, waiting apparently for some valuable advice.

George found the senior lieutenant, crouched behind a fallen log, getting the company in hand again through runners.

"Where's Captain Planter?"

The lieutenant nodded carelessly ahead.

"Hundred yards or so out there. He ran the show too much himself," he complained. "Bunch of Jerries jumped out of the thicket and threw potato mashers, then crawled back to the guns. When the captain went down the men near him broke. Sort of thing spreads like a pestilence."

"Dead?" George asked.

"Don't know. Potato mashers!"

"Why haven't you found out?" George asked, irritably.

The complaining note increased in the other's voice.

"He's at the foot of that tree. Hear those guns? They're just zipping a few while they wait for someone to get to him."

"Pull your company together," George said with an absurd feeling that he spoke to Mrs. Planter. "I'll go along and see that we get him and those nests. They're spoiling the entire afternoon."

The lieutenant glanced at him, startled.

"I can do it——"

"You haven't," George reminded him.

He despatched runners to the flank companies and to regimental headquarters announcing that he was moving ahead. When the battalion advanced, like a lot of fairly clever Indians, he was in the van, making straight for the tree. He had a queer idea that Mrs. Planter quietly searched in the underbrush ahead of him. The machine guns, which had been trickling, gushed.

"You're hit, sir," the lieutenant said.

George glanced at his right boot. There was a hole in the leather, but he didn't feel any pain. He dismissed the lieutenant's suggestion of stretcher bearers. He limped ahead. Why should he assume this risk for Lambert? Sylvia wouldn't thank him for it. She wouldn't thank him for anything, but her mother would. He had to get Lambert back and complete his task, but he was afraid to examine the still form he saw at last at the base of the tree, and he knew very well that that was only because Lambert was his friend. He designated a man to guide the stretcher bearers, and bent, his mind full of swift running and vicious tackles, abrupt and brutal haltings of this figure that seemed to be asleep, that would never run again.

Lambert stirred.

"Been expecting you, George," he said, sleepily.

"Anything besides your leg?" George asked.

"Guess not," Lambert answered. "What more do you want? Thanks for coming."

George left him to the stretcher bearers and hurried

on full of envy; for Lambert was going home, and George hadn't dared stop to urge him to forget that dangerous nonsense he had talked the other night. Nonsense! You had only to look at these brown figures trying to flank the spouting guns. Why did they have to glance continually at him? Why had they paused when he had paused to speak to Lambert? Same side of the window! But a few of them stumbled and slept as they fell.

He had just begun to worry about the blood in his right boot when something snapped at the bone of his good leg, and he pitched forward helplessly.

"Some tackle!" he thought.

Then through his brain, suddenly confused, flashed an overwhelming gratitude. He couldn't walk. He couldn't go forward. He wouldn't have to take any more risks beyond those shared with the stretcher bearers who would carry him back. Like Lambert, he was through. He was going home—home to Sylvia, to success, to the coveted knowledge of why he had fought this war.

The lieutenant, frightened, solicitous, crawled to him, summoning up the stretcher bearers, for the advance had gone a little ahead, the German range had shortened to meet it.

"How bad, sir?"

George indicated his legs.

"Never learned how to walk on my hands."

The lieutenant straightened, calling out cursing commands. George managed to achieve a sitting posture. By gad! This leg hurt! It made him a little

giddy. Only once before, he thought vaguely, had he experienced such pain. What was the trouble here? The advance had halted, probably because the word had spread that he was down.

What was it Lambert had said about putting the rank and file on the same side of the window? The rank and file wanted an officer, and the higher the officer the farther it would go. That was answer enough for Lambert, Squibs, Allen——And he would point it out to them all, for the stretcher bearers had come up, had lifted him to the stretcher, were ready to start him back to decency, to safety——

Thank God there wasn't any multitude or an insane trainer here to order him about.

"They've stopped again," the lieutenant sobbed. "Some of them are coming back."

That sort of thing did spread like a pestilence, but there was nothing George could do about it. He had done his job. Good job, too. Soft billet now. Decency. Sylvia. No Green. No multitude——

"You make a touchdown!"

And he became aware at last of the multitude—raving higher officers in comfortable places; countless victims of invasion, waiting patiently to go home; myriads in the cities, intoxicated with enthusiasm and wine, tumbling happily from military play to patriotic bazaar; but most eloquent of all in that innumerable company were the silent and cold brown figures lying about him in the underbrush.

His brain, a little delirious, was filled with the roaring from the stands. The crowd was commanding

him to get ahead somehow, to wipe out those deadly nests, to let the regiment, the army, tired nations, sweep on to peace and the end of an unbelievable madness.

Once more he glanced through blurred eyes at his clothing and saw livery, and this time he had put it on of his own free will. He seemed to hear Squibs:

"World lives by service."

"I'm in the service," he thought. "Got to serve."

It impressed him as quite pitiful that now he would never know just why.

"Where you going?" he demanded of the stretcher bearers who had begun to carry him back.

They tried to explain, hurrying a little. He threatened them with his revolver.

"Turn around. Let's go—with the battalion."

The lieutenant saw, the men saw, these frightened figures running with loping steps, carrying a stretcher which they jerked and twitched so that the figure lying on it with arm raised, holding a revolver, suffered agonies and struggled not to be flung to the ground. And the lieutenant and the men sprang to their feet, ran forward, shouted:

"Follow the Major!"

The German gunners, caught by surprise, hesitated, had trouble, therefore, shortening their ranges; and as panic spreads so does the sudden spirit of victory.

"Same side of the window!" George grumbled as the bearers set him down behind the captured guns.

"Just the same," he rambled, "fine fellows. Who said they weren't fine fellows?"

He wanted to argue it angrily with a wounded German propped against a shattered tree, but the lieutenant interrupted him, bringing up a medical orderly, asking him if he had any instructions. George answered very pleasantly:

"Not past me, Mr. Planter! Rank and file myself!"

The lieutenant glanced significantly at the medical orderly. He looked sharply at George's hair and suddenly pointed.

"They nicked him in the head, too."

The orderly knelt and examined the place the lieutenant had indicated.

"Oh, no, sir. That's quite an old scar."

XII

"Lost a leg or two?" Allen asked.

"Not yet. Don't think I shall. Planter's not so lucky, but he'll get home sooner."

Allen brought George his one relief from the deadly monotony of the base hospital. He had sent for him because he wanted his opinion as to the possibility of an armistice. Blodgett, however, hadn't waited for the result of the conference. The day Allen arrived a letter came from him, telling George not to worry.

"King Ferdy along about the last of September whispered I'd better begin to unload. It's a killing, George."

With his mind clear of that George could be amused by Allen. The friend of the people wore some striking clothes from London tailors and haberdashers. He carried a cunning little cane. He had managed something extremely neat in moustaches. He spoke with a perceptible West End accent. But in reply to George's sneering humour he made this astonishing remark:

"It isn't nearly as much fun being a top-hole person as I thought it was going to be."

"You're lucky to have found it out," George said, "for your job's about over. Of course I could get you something in Wall Street."

"Doubt if I should want it," Allen said. "I've always got my old job."

George whistled.

"You mean you'd go back to long hair, cheap clothes, and violent words?"

"Why not? I only took your offer, Morton, because I was inclined to agree with you that in the outside world's anxiety to look at what was going on over the fence people'd stop thinking. Russia didn't stop thinking, and after the armistice you watch America begin to use its brain."

"You mean the downtrodden," George sneered.

"That's the greater part of any country," Allen said, his acquired accent forgotten, his perfectly clean hands commencing to gesture.

But George wouldn't listen to him, got rid of him, turned to the wall with an ugly feeling that he had gone out of his way to nurture one of the makers of

the hell after war.

PART V

THE NEW WORLD

I

George crushed his uneasy thoughts, trying to dwell instead on the idea that he was going back to the normal, but all at once he experienced a dread of the normal, perhaps, because he was no longer normal himself. Could he limp before Sylvia with his old assurance? Would people pity him, or would he irritate them because he had a disability? And snatches of his talks at the front with Wandel etched themselves sharply against his chaotic recollections of those days. Was Wandel fair? Was it, indeed, the original George Morton people had always liked? Here, apart from the turmoil, he didn't believe it, didn't dare believe it. Those people wouldn't have cared for him except for his assumption of qualities which he had chosen as from a counter display. Yet was it the real George Morton that made him in superlative moments break the traces of his acquired judgments, as he had done at New Haven, in the Argonne, to dash selflessly into the service of others? Rotten inside, indeed! Even in the hospital he set out to crush that impulsive, dangerous part of him.

But the nearer he drew to home the more he suffered from a depression that he could only define as homesickness—homesickness for the old ways, the old habits, the old thoughts; and the memory of his temerity with Sylvia at the moment of their parting was like a great cloud threatening the future with destructive storm.

Lambert, wearing a contrivance the doctors had given him in place of what the country had taken away, accompanied by Betty and the Baillys, met the transport. Betty and Mrs. Bailly cried, and George shook his heavy stick at them.

"See here! I'm not going to limp like this always."

Bailly encircled him with his thin arms.

"You're too old to play football, anyway, George."

George found himself wanting Betty's arms, their forgetfulness, their understanding, their tenderness.

"When are you two going to be married?" he forced himself to ask.

Betty looked away, her white cheeks flushing, but Lambert hurried an answer.

"As soon as you're able to get to Princeton. You're to be best man."

"Honoured."

So Lambert's crippling hadn't made any difference to Betty, but how did Sylvia take it? He wanted to ask Lambert where she was, if anything had happened to her, any other mad affair, now that the war was over, like the one with Blodgett; but he couldn't ask, and no one volunteered to tell him, and it wasn't

until his visit to Oakmont, on his first leave from the hospital, that he learned anything whatever about her, and that was only what his eyes in a moment told him.

Lambert drove over and got George, explaining that his mother wanted to see him.

"She'd have come to the dock," he said, "but Father these days is rather hard to leave."

George went reluctantly, belligerently, for since his landing his feeling of homesickness had increased with the realization that his victorious country was more radically altered than he had fancied. The ride, however, had the advantage of an uninterrupted talk with Lambert which developed gossip that Blodgett, stuffed with business, hadn't yet given him.

Goodhue and Wandel, for instance, were still abroad, holding down showy jobs at the peace conference. Dalrymple, on the other hand, had been home for months.

"Most successful war," Lambert told George. "Scarcely smelled fire, but got a couple foreign decorations, and a promotion—my poor old leg wasn't worth it, or yours, George, but what odds now? And as soon as the show stopped at Sedan he was trotting back. Can't help admiring him, for that sort of thing spells success, and he's steady as a church. Try to realize that, and take a new start with him, for he's really likeable when he keeps to the straight and narrow. Prohibition's going to fit in very well, although I believe he's got himself in hand."

George stared at the ugly, familiar landscape, trying not to listen, particularly to the rest. Why should the

Planters have taken Dalrymple into the marble temple?

"A small start," Lambert was saying, "but if he makes the grade there's a big future for him there. I fancy he's anxious to meet you halfway. How about you, George?"

"I'll make no promises," George said. "It depends entirely on Dalrymple."

Lambert didn't warn him, so he didn't expect to find Dalrymple enjoying the early spring graces of Oakmont. He managed the moment of meeting, however, without disclosing anything. Dalrymple, for the time, was quite unimportant. It was Sylvia he was anxious about, Sylvia who undoubtedly nursed a sort of horror of what he had ventured to do and say at Upton. Everyone else was outside, as if making a special effort to welcome him. Where was she?

He resented the worshipful attentions of the servants.

"I'm quite capable of managing myself," he said, as he motioned them aside and lowered himself from the automobile.

He disliked old Planter's heartiness, although he could see the physical effort it cost, for the once-threatening eyes were nearly dark; and the big shoulders stooped forward as if in a constant effort to escape a pursuing pain; and the voice, which talked about heroes and the country's debt and the Planters' debt, quavered and once or twice broke altogether, then groped doubtfully ahead in an effort to recover the propelling thought.

Mrs. Planter, at least, spared him any sentimental gratitude. She was rather grayer and had in her face

some unremembered lines, but those were the only changes George could detect. As far as her manner went this greeting might have followed the farewell at Upton after only a day or so.

"I hope your wound isn't very painful."

"My limping," he answered, "is simply bad habit. I'm overcoming it."

"That's nice. Then you'll be able to play polo again!"

"I should hope so, as long as ponies have four good legs."

He wished other people could be like her, so unobtrusively, unannoyingly primeval.

As he entered the hall he saw Sylvia without warning, and he caught his breath and watched her as she came slowly down the stairs. He tried to realize that this was that coveted moment he had so frequently fancied the war would deny him—the moment that brought him face to face with Sylvia again, to witness her enmity, to desire to break it down, to want her more than he had ever done.

She came straight to him, but even in the presence of the others she didn't offer her hand, and all she said was:

"I was quite sure you would come back."

"You knew I had to," he laughed.

Then he sharpened his ears, for she was telling her brother something about Betty's having telephoned she was driving over to take Lambert, Dalrymple, and herself to Princeton.

No. The war had changed her less than any one George had seen. She was as beautiful, as unforgiving, as intolerant; and he guessed that it was she and not Betty who had made the arrangement which would take her away from him.

"George will come, too," Lambert began.

"Afraid I'm not up to it," George refused, dryly.

At Betty's wedding, however, she would have to be with him, for it developed during this nervous chatter that they would share the honours of the bridal party.

So, helplessly, he had to watch her go, and for a moment he felt as if he had had a strong tonic, for she alone had been able to give him an impression that the world hadn't altered much, after all.

The reaction came in the quiet hours following. He was at first resentful that Mrs. Planter should accompany him on the painful walk the doctors had ordered him, like Old Planter, to take daily. He had wanted to go back to the little house, highest barrier of all which Sylvia would never let him climb. Then, glancing at the quiet woman, he squared his shoulders. Suppose Wandel had been right! Here was a test. At any rate, the war was a pretty large and black background for so tiny a high light. Purposefully, therefore, he carried out his original purpose. By the side of Mrs. Planter he limped toward the little house. They didn't say much. It wasn't easy for him to talk while he exercised, and perhaps she understood that.

Even before the clean white building shone in the sun through the trees he heard a sound that made

him wince. It was like a distant drum, badly played. Then he understood what it was, and his boyhood, and the day of awakening and revolt, submerged him in a hot wave of shame. He could see his mother rising and bending rhythmically over fine linen which emerged from dirty water, making her arms look too red and swollen. He glanced quickly at Mrs. Planter to whose serenity had gone the upward effort of many generations. Just how appalling, now that war had mocked life so dreadfully, now that a pitiless hand had a moment ago stripped all pretence from the world, was the difference between them?

It was the woman at the tub, curiously enough, who seemed trying to tell him, trying to warn him to keep his mouth shut. Then the house was visible through the trees. He raised his stick.

"I wanted to see it again," he said, defiantly, "because I was born there. I lived there."

She paused and stared with him, without saying anything, without any change of expression. After a time she turned.

"Have you looked enough? Shall we go back, George?"

He nodded, glancing at her wonderingly. After all, he had had very little love in his life. Mrs. Bailly, Betty ——

He had never dreamed of such gratitude as this. Lambert, home with his war madness fresh upon him, must have told her, as an example of what a man might do. But was her action all gratitude? Rather wasn't it a signpost at the parting of two ages?

If that were so, he told himself, the world had left Sylvia hopelessly behind.

II

The memory of that unguarded moment remained in his mind uncomfortably. He carried it finally from the hospital to his musty apartment, where he stripped off his uniform and looked in the glass, for the first time in nearly two years his own master, no man's servant.

Was he his own master as long as he could commit such sentimental follies, as long as he could suspect that he had told Wandel the truth on the Vesle? This nostalgia must be the rebound from the war, of which he had heard so much, which made men weak, or lazy, or indifferent.

He continued to stare in the glass, angry, amazed. He had to overcome this homesick feeling. He had to prepare himself for harder battles than he had ever fought. He had had plenty of warning of the selfishness that was creeping over the world like a black pestilence. Where was his own self-will that had carried him so far?

He locked himself, as it were, in his apartment. He sat down and called on his will. With a systematic brutality he got himself in hand. He reviewed his aims: to make more money, to get Sylvia. He emerged at last, hard and uncompromising, ready for the selfish ones, and went down town. Blodgett greeted him with a cheer.

"Miracles! For the first time since you got back you look yourself again."

"I am," George answered, "all but the limp. That will go some day maybe."

He wanted it to go. He desired enormously to rid himself of the last reminder of his service.

Lambert was definitely caught by the marble temple, but Goodhue and he would stay together, more or less tied to Blodgett, to accept the opportunities George foresaw for dragging money by sharp reasoning from the reconstruction period. He applied himself to exchange. From their position they could run wild in the stock market at little risk, but there were big things to be made out of exchange, about which the cleverest men didn't seem to know anything worth a penny in any currency.

Everyone noticed his recovery, and everyone congratulated him except Bailly. When George went down to Betty's wedding the long tutor met him at the station, crying out querulously:

"What's happened to you?"

George laughed.

"Got over the war reaction, I guess."

"What the deuce did you go to war for at all then?" Bailly asked.

"Haven't found that out myself yet," George answered, "but I know I wouldn't go to another, even if they'd have me."

He grimaced at his injured foot.

"And they're going to give you some kind of a medal!" Bailly cried.

"I didn't ask for it," George said, "but I daresay a lot of people, you among them, went down to Washington and did."

Bailly was a trifle uncomfortable.

"See here," George said. "I don't want your old medal, and I don't intend to be scolded about it. I suppose I've got to rush right out to the Alstons."

"Let's stop at the club," Bailly proposed. "People want to see you. We'll fight the war over with the veterans."

"Damn the war!" George said.

Mrs. Bailly, when he paused for a moment at the house in Dickinson Street, attacked him, and quite innocently, from a different direction.

"It was the wish of my life, George, that you should have Betty, and you might have had. I can't help feeling that."

"You're prejudiced," George laughed.

He went to the Alstons, nevertheless, almost unwillingly, and he delayed his arrival until the last minute. The intimate party had gathered for a dinner and a rehearsal that night. The wedding was set for the next evening.

The Tudor house had an unfamiliar air, as though Betty already had taken from it every feature that had given it distinction in George's mind. And Betty herself was caught by all those detailed considerations that surround a girl, at this vital moment of her life, with an atmosphere regal, mysterious, a little sacred. So George didn't see her until just before dinner, or Sylvia, who was upstairs

with her. Lambert and Blodgett were about, however, and so was Dalrymple. George was glad Lambert had asked Blodgett to usher; he owed it to him, but he was annoyed that Dalrymple should have been included in the party, for it was another mark, on top of his presence in the marble temple, of a tightening bond of intimacy between him and the Planters. George examined the man, therefore, with an eager curiosity. He looked well enough, but George remained unconvinced by his apparent reformation, suspecting its real purpose was to impress a willing public, for he had studied Dalrymple during many years without uncovering any real strength, or any disposition not to answer gladly to every appeal of the senses. At least he was restless, rising from his chair too often to wander about the room, but George conceded with a smile that his own arrival might be responsible for that. The matter of the notes hadn't been mentioned, but they existed undoubtedly even in Dalrymple's careless mind, which must have forecasted an uncomfortable day of payment.

Lambert seemed sure enough of his friend.

"Dolly's sticking to the job like a leech," he said to George when they went upstairs to dress.

"I've no faith in him," George answered, shortly.

"You're an unforgiving brute," Lambert said.

George hastened away from the subject.

"I'm not chameleon, at least," he admitted with a smile, "which reminds me. I don't see any of your dearly beloved brothers of the ranks in your bridal party. Have you put private Oscar Liporowski up for

any of your clubs yet?"

"Unforgiving and unforgetting!" Lambert laughed.

"Then you acknowledge that talk in the Argonne was war madness?"

"By no means," Lambert answered, suddenly serious. "Let me get married, will you? I can't bother with anything else now. Sylvia, whose mind isn't filled with romance, threatens to become the socialist of the family."

George stared at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"About what Sylvia's talking about," Lambert answered.

"Now I know you're mad," George said.

Lambert shook his head.

"But I don't take her very seriously. It's a nice game to seek beauties in Bolshevism. It's played in some of the best houses. You must have observed it—how wonderfully it helps get through a tea or a dinner."

III

George went to his own room, amused and curious. Could Sylvia talk communism, even parrot-like, and deny him the rights of a brother? He became more anxious than before to see her. He shrank, on the other hand, from facing Betty who was about to take this enormous step permanently away from him. Out of his window he could see the tree beneath which he had made his confession in an effort to kill Betty's

kindness. If he had followed her to the castle then Lambert wouldn't be limping about exposing a happiness that made George envious and discontented. It was a reminder with a vengeance that his friends were mating. Was he, like Blodgett, doomed to a revolting celibacy?

Blodgett, as far as that went, seemed quite to have recovered from the blow Sylvia had given his pride and heart. With his increasing fortune his girth had increased, his cheeks grown fuller, his eyes smaller.

He was chatting, when George came down, with Old Planter, who sat slouched in an easy chair in the library, and Mr. Alston. It was evident that the occasion was not a joyous one for Betty's father.

"I've half a mind to sell out here," George heard him say, "and take a share in a coöperative apartment in town. Without Betty the house will be like a world without a sun."

Blodgett, George guessed, was tottering on the threshold of expansive sympathy. He drew back, beckoning George.

"Here's your purchaser, Alston. I never knew a half back stay single so long. And now he's a hero. He's bound to need a nest soon."

Mr. Alston smiled at him.

"Is there anything in that, George?"

George wanted to tell Blodgett to mind his own business. How could the man, after his recent experience, make cumbersome jokes of that colour?

"There was a time," Mr. Alston went on, "when I fancied you were going to ask me for Betty. The

thought of refusing used to worry me."

George laughed uncomfortably.

"So you would have refused?"

"Naturally. I don't think I could have said yes to Lambert if it hadn't been for the war. If you ever have a daughter—just one—you'll know what I mean."

From the three men George received an impression of imminence, shared it himself. They talked merely to cover their suspense. They were like people in a throne room, attentive for the entrance of a figure, exalted, powerful, nearly legendary. Betty, he reflected, had become that because she was about to marry. He found himself fascinated, too, looking at the door, waiting with a choked feeling for that girl who had unconsciously tempted him from their first meeting. Her arrival, indeed, had about it something of the processional. Mrs. Planter entered the doorway first, nodding absent-mindedly to the men. Betty's mother followed, as imperial as ever, more so, if anything, George thought, and quite unaffected by the deeper elements that gave to this quiet wedding in a country house a breath of tragedy. Betty Alston Planter! That evolution clearly meant happiness for her. She tried to express it through vivacious gestures and cheerful, uncompleted sentences. Betty next—after a tiny interval, entering not without hesitation exposed in her walk, in her tall and graceful figure, in her face which was unaccustomedly colourful, in her eyes which turned from one to another, doubtful, apprehensive, groping. George didn't want to look at her; her appearance placed him too much in concord with her reluctant father; too much in the position of a man

making a hurtful and unasked oblation.

Momentarily Betty, the portion of his past shared with her, its undeveloped possibilities, were swept from his brain. Last of all, fitting and brilliant close for the procession, came Sylvia between two bridesmaids. George scarcely saw the others. Sylvia filled his eyes, his heart, slowly crowded the dissatisfaction from his mind, centred again his thoughts and his ambitions. Nearly automatically he took Betty's hands, spoke to her a few formalities, yielded her to her father, and went on to Sylvia. For nearly two years he hadn't seen her in an evening gown. What secret did she possess that kept her constant? Already she was past the age at which most girls of her station marry, yet to him her beauty had only increased without quite maturing. And why had she calmly avoided during all these years the nets thrown perpetually by men? Only Blodgett had threatened to entangle her, and one day had found her fled. And she wasn't such a fool she didn't know the years were slipping by. More poignantly than ever he responded to a feeling of danger, imminent, unavoidable, fatal.

"My companion in the ceremonies," he said.

"I understood that was the arrangement," she answered, without looking at him.

"I'm glad," he said, "to draw even a reflection from the happiness of others."

"I often wonder," she remarked, "why people are so selfish."

"Do you mean me," he laughed, "or the leading man and lady?"

She spoke softly to avoid the possibility of anyone else hearing.

"I'm not sure, but I fancy you are the most selfish person I have ever met."

"That's a stupendous indictment these days," he said with a smile, but he didn't take her seriously at all, didn't apply her charge to his soul.

"I'm so glad you're here," he went on, "that we're to be together. I've wanted it for a long time. You must know that."

She gave him an uncomfortable sense of being captive, of seeking blindly any course to freedom.

"I no longer know anything about you. I don't care to know."

Lambert and Dalrymple strolled in. Dalrymple opened the cage. George moved away, aching to prevent such interference by any means he could. His emotion made him uneasy. To what resolution were his relations with Dalrymple drifting? How far was he capable of going to keep the other in his place?

He stood by the mantel, speaking only when it was necessary and then without consciousness, his whole interest caught by the picture Dalrymple and Sylvia made, close together by the centre table in the soft light of a reading lamp.

A servant entered with cocktails. George's interest sharpened. Betty took hers with the others. Only Sylvia and Dalrymple shook their heads. Clearly it was an understanding between them—a little denial of hers to make his infinitely greater one less difficult. She smiled up at him, indeed,

comprehendingly; but George's glance didn't waver from Dalrymple, and it caught an increase in the other's restlessness, a following nearly hypnotic, by thoughtful eyes, of the tray with the little glasses as it passed around the room. George relaxed. He was conscious enough of Blodgett's bellow:

"Here's to the blushing bride!"

What lack of taste! But how much greater the lack of taste that restless inheritor exposed! Couldn't even join a formal toast, didn't dare probably, or was it that he only dared not risk it in public, in front of Sylvia? And she pandered to his weakness, smiled upon it as if it were an epic strength. He was sufficiently glad now that Dalrymple had got into him for so much money.

IV

For George dinner was chiefly a sea of meaningless chatter continually ruffled by the storm of Blodgett's voice.

"Your brother tells me," he said to Sylvia, "that you're irritating yourself with socialism."

She looked at him with a little interest then.

"I've been reading. It's quite extraordinary. Odd I should have lived so long without really knowing anything about such things."

"Not odd at all," George contradicted her. "I should call it odd that you find any interest in them now. Why do you?"

"One has to occupy one's mind," she answered.

He glanced at her. Why did she have to occupy herself with matter she couldn't possibly understand, that she would interpret always in a wrong or unsafe manner? She, too, was restless.

That was the only possible explanation. From Blodgett she had sprung to war-time fads. From those she had leaped at this convenient one which tempted people to make sparkling and meaningless phrases.

"It doesn't strike you as at all amusing," he asked, "that you should be red, that I should be conservative?"

She didn't answer. Blodgett swept them out to sea again.

Later in the evening, however, George repeated his question, and demanded an answer. They had accomplished the farce of a rehearsal, source of cumbersome jokes for Blodgett and the clergyman; of doubts and dreary prospects for Mr. Alston, who had done his share as if submitting to an undreamed-of punishment.

There was the key-ring joke. It must be a part of the curriculum of all the theological seminaries. George acted up to it, promising to tie a string around his finger, or to pin the circlet to his waistcoat.

"Or," Blodgett roared, "at a pinch you might use the ring of the wedding bells."

George stared at him. How could the man, Sylvia within handgrasp, grin and feed such a mood? It suddenly occurred to him that once more he was reading Blodgett wrong, that the man was admirable, far more so than he could be under an equal trial.

Would he, a little later, be asked to face such an ordeal?

With the departure of the clergyman a cloud of reaction descended upon the party. Some yawns were scarcely stifled. Sporadic attempts to dance to a victrola faded into dialogues carried on indifferently, lazily, where the dancers had chanced to stop with the music. Mr. Alston had relinquished Sylvia to George at the moment the record had stuttered out. They were left at a distance from any other couple. George pointed out a convenient chair, and she sat down and glanced about the room indifferently.

"At dinner," George said, "I asked you if it didn't impress you as strange that our social views should be what they are, and opposite."

She didn't answer.

"I mean," he went on, "that I should benefit by your alteration."

"How?" she asked, idly fingering a flower, not looking at him.

"I fancy," he said, "that you'll admit your chief objection to me has always been my origin, my ridiculous position trotting watchfully behind the most unsocial Miss Planter. Am I not right?"

"You are entirely wrong," she said, wearily. "That has never had anything to do with my—my dislike. I think I shall go——"

"Wait," he said. "You are not telling me the truth. If you are consistent you will turn your enmity to friendship at least. You will decide there was nothing unusual in my asking you to marry me. You will

even find in that a reason for my anxiety at Upton. You will understand that it is quite inevitable I should ask you to marry me again."

She sprang up and hurried away from him.

"Put on another record, Dolly——"

And almost before he had realized it Betty had taken her away, and the evening's opportunities had closed.

V

For him the house became like a room at night out of which the only lamp has been carried.

The others drifted away. George tried to read in the library. His uneasiness, his anger, held him from bed. When at last he went upstairs he fancied everyone was asleep, but moving in the hall outside his room he saw a figure in a dressing gown. It paused as if it didn't care to be detected going in the direction of the stairs. George caught the figure's embarrassed hesitation, fancied a movement of retreat.

"Dalrymple!" he called, softly.

The other waited sullenly.

"What you up to?" George asked.

"Thought I'd explore downstairs for a book. Couldn't sleep. Nothing in my room worth bothering with."

George smiled, the memory of Blodgett's admirable behaviour crowding his mind. What better time than now to let his anger dictate to him, as it had done that day in his office?

"Come in for a minute," he proposed to Dalrymple, and opened his door.

Dalrymple shook his head, but George took his arm and led him, guessing that Dalrymple feared the subject of the notes.

"Bad humour!" George said. "You seem to be the only one up. I don't mind chatting with you before turning in. Fact is, these wedding parties are stupid, don't you think?"

Possibly George's manner was reassuring to Dalrymple. At any rate, he yielded. George took off his coat, sat in an easy chair, and pressed the call button.

"What's that for?" Dalrymple asked, uneasily.

"Sit down," George said. "Stupid and dry, these things! I'm going to try to raise a servant. I want to gossip over a drink before I go to bed. You'll join me?"

Dalrymple sat down. He moistened his lips.

"On the wagon," he muttered. "A long time on the wagon. Place to be, too, and all that."

George didn't believe the other. If Dalrymple cared to prove him right that was his own business.

"Before prohibition offers the steps?" he laughed.

"Nothing to do with it," Dalrymple muttered. "Got my reasons—good enough ones, too."

"Right!" George said. "Only don't leave me to myself until I've wet my whistle."

And when the sleepy servant had come George asked

him for some whiskey and soda water. He talked of the Alstons, of the war, of anything to tide the wait for the caraffe and the bottles and glasses; and during that period Dalrymple's restlessness increased. Just what had he been sneaking downstairs for in the middle of the night? George watched the other's eyes drawn by the tray when the servant had set it down.

"Why did he bring two glasses?" Dalrymple asked, irritably.

"Oh," George said, carelessly, "I suppose he thought—naturally——Have a biscuit, anyway."

George poured a drink and supped contentedly.

"Dry rations—biscuits," Dalrymple complained.

He fingered the caraffe.

"I've an idea—wedding—special occasion, and all that. Change my mind—up here—one friendly drop ——"

George watched the friendly drop expand to half a tumbler full, and he observed that the hand that poured was not quite steady. It wouldn't be long now before he would know whether or not Dalrymple's reformation was merely a pose in public, a pose for Sylvia.

Dalrymple sighed, sat down, and talked quite pleasantly about the horrors of Chaumont. After a time he refilled his glass, and repeated the performance a number of times with diminishing intervals. George smiled. A child could tell the other was breaking no extended abstinence. He drifted from war to New York and his apparent success with the house of Planter.

"Slavery, this office stuff!" he rattled on, "but good fun to get things done, to climb up on shoulders of men—oh, no idea how many, Morton—who're only good to push a pen or pound a typewriter. Of course, you know, though. Done plenty of climbing yourself."

His enunciation suffered and his assurance strengthened as the caraffe emptied. No extended abstinence, George reflected, but almost certainly a very painful one of a few days.

"Am making money, Morton—a little, not much," he said, confidentially, and with condescension. "Not enough by long shot to pay those beastly notes I owe you. Know they're over due. Don't think I'd ever forget that. Want to do right thing, Morton. You used hard words when I borrowed that money, but forget, and all that. White of you to let me have it, and I'll do right thing."

A sickly look of content overspread his face. He expanded. His assurance seemed to crowd the room.

"Wouldn't worry for a minute 'bout those notes if I were you."

He suddenly switched, shaking his finger at the caraffe.

"Very pleasant, little drop like this—night cap on the quiet. But not often."

His content sought expression in a smile.

"Dolly's off the hootch."

George lighted a cigarette. He noticed that his fingers were quite steady, yet he was perfectly conscious of each beat of his heart.

"May I ask," he said, "what possible connection there can be between my not worrying about your notes and your keeping off the hootch, as you call it?"

Dalrymple arose, finished the caraffe, and tapped George's shoulder.

"Every connection," he answered. "Expect you have a right to know. Don't you worry, old Shylock Morton. You're goin' to get your pound ah flesh."

"I fancy I am," George laughed. "What's your idea of it?"

Dalrymple waved his glass.

"Lady of my heart—surrender after long siege, but only brave deserve fair. Good thing college education. Congratulate me, Morton. But secret for you, 'cause you old Shylock. Wouldn't say anything to Sylvia till she lets it loose."

As George walked quietly to the door, which the servant a long time ago had left a trifle open, he heard Dalrymple mouthing disconnected words: "Model husband." "Can't be too soon for Dolly."

Then, as he closed the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, he heard Dalrymple say aloud, sharply:

"What the devil you doing, Morton?"

George turned. Ammunition against Dalrymple! He had been collecting it. Now, clearly, was the time to use it. In his mind the locked room held precariously all of Sylvia's happiness and his.

He didn't hesitate. He walked straight to the table. Dalrymple had slumped down in his chair, the

content and triumph of his inflamed eyes replaced by a sullen fear.

VI

"What's the idea?" Dalrymple asked, uncertainly, watching George, grasping the arms of his chair preparatory to rising.

"Sit still, and I'll tell you," George answered.

"Why you lock the door?"

From Dalrymple's palpable fear George watched escape a reluctant and fascinated curiosity.

"No more of that strong-arm stuff with me——"

"I locked the door," George answered, "so that I could point out to you, quite undisturbed, just why you are going to leave Sylvia Planter alone."

Dalrymple relaxed. He commenced incredulously and nervously to laugh, but in his eyes, which followed George, the fear and the curiosity increased.

"What the devil are you talking about? Have you gone out of your head?"

George smiled confidently.

"It's an invariable rule, unless you have the strength to handle them, to give insane people their way. So you'll be nice and quiet; and I might remind you if you started a rumpus, the first questions the aroused house would ask would be, 'Why did Dolly fall off the wagon, and where did he get the edge?'"

He drew a chair close to Dalrymple and sat down. The other lay back, continuing to stare at him, quite

unable to project the impression he undoubtedly sought of contemptuous amusement.

"We've waited a long time for this little chat," George said, quietly. "Sometimes I've hoped it wouldn't be necessary. Of course, sooner or later, it had to be."

His manner disclosed little of his anxiety, nothing whatever of his determination, through Dalrymple's weakness, to save Sylvia and himself, but his will had never been stronger.

"You may as well understand," he said, "that you shan't leave this room until you've agreed to give up any idea of this preposterous marriage you pretend to have arranged. Perhaps you have. That makes no difference. I'm quite satisfied its disarranging will break no hearts."

Dalrymple had a little controlled himself. George's brusque campaign had steadied him, had hastened a reaction that gave to his eyes an unhealthy and furtive look. He tried to grin.

"You must think you're God Almighty——"

"Let's get to business," George interrupted. "I once told you that what you borrow you have to pay back in one way or another. This is where we settle, and I've outlined the terms."

Dalrymple whistled.

"You complete rotter! You mean to blackmail—because you know I haven't got your filthy money, and can't raise it in a minute."

"Never mind that," George snapped. "Your opinion of what I'm doing doesn't interest me. I've thought it out. I know quite thoroughly what I'm about."

He did, and he was not without distaste for his methods, nor without realization that they might hurt him most of all with the very person they were designed to serve; yet he couldn't hesitate, because no other way offered.

"You're going to pay my notes, but not with money."

Dalrymple's grin exploded into a harsh sound resembling laughter.

"Are you—jealous? Do you fancy Sylvia would be affected by anything you'd do or say? See here! Good God! Are you mad enough to look at her? That's funny! That's a scream!"

There was, however, no conviction behind the pretended amazement and contempt; and George suspected that Dalrymple had all along sounded his chief ambition; had, in fact, made his secretive announcement just now, because, his judgment drugged, he had desired to call a rival's attention to his triumphant posture on the steps of attainment.

"I've no intention of discussing causes," George answered, evenly, "but I do imagine the entire family would be noticeably affected by my story."

"Which you couldn't tell," Dalrymple cried. "Which you couldn't possibly tell."

"Which I don't think I shall have to tell," George said with a smile. "Look at your position, Dalrymple. If you borrow money on the strength of this approaching marriage you announce its chief purpose quite distinctly. I fancy Old Planter, ill as he is, would want to take a club to you. You've always wished, haven't you, to keep your borrowings from Lambert? You can't do it if you persist in involving

the Planters in your extravagances. And remember you gave me a pretty thorough list of your debtors—not reading for women, but Lambert would understand, and make its meaning clear. Then let us go back to that afternoon in my office, when you tried to say unspeakable things——"

Impulsively Dalrymple bared his teeth.

"Got you there, Morton! I told Lambert it was you who had been impertinent——"

All at once George felt better and cleaner. He whistled.

"When I let you off then I never dreamed you'd try to back that lie up."

"Will they believe me," the other asked, "or you, who come from God knows what; God knows where?"

"Fortunately," George said, "Lambert and his sister share that supernal knowledge. They'll believe me."

He stood up.

"That's all. You know what to expect. Just one thing more."

He spoke softly, without any apparent passion, but he displayed before the man in the chair his two hands.

"If necessary I'd stop you marrying Sylvia Planter with those."

Dalrymple got to his feet, struggled to assume a cloak of bravado.

"Won't put up with such threats. Actionable——"

"Give me your decision," George said, harshly. "Will you keep away from her? If there is really an understanding, will you so arrange things that she can destroy it immediately? Come. Yes or no?"

"Give me that key."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"I needn't trouble you."

He walked swiftly to the door, unlocked it, and drew it invitingly wide; but now that the way was clear Dalrymple hesitated. Again George shrugged his shoulders and stepped to the hall. Dalrymple, abruptly active, ran after him, grasping at his arm.

"Where you going?" he whispered.

"To Lambert's room."

"Not to-night," the other begged. "I don't admit you could make any real trouble, but I want to spare Sylvia any possible unpleasantness. Well! Don't you, too? You lost your temper. Maybe I did mine. Give us both a chance to think it over. Now see here, Morton, I won't ask you another favour, and I'll do nothing in the meantime. I couldn't very well. I mean, status quo, and all that——"

"Lambert, to-morrow," George said, "is going away for more than a month."

"But you could always get hold of him, at a pinch," Dalrymple urged. "Heaven knows I'm not likely to talk to Sylvia about what you've said. Let us both think it over until Lambert comes back."

George sighed, experiencing a glow of victory. The other's eagerness confessed at last an accurate

measure of the power of his ammunition; and George didn't want to go to the Planters on such an errand as long as any other means existed. The more Dalrymple thought, the more thoroughly he must realize George had him. From the first George had manœuvred to avoid the necessity of shocking habits of thought and action that were inborn in the Planters, so he gladly agreed.

"Meantime, you'll keep away from her?"

"Just as far as possible," Dalrymple answered. "You'll be able to see that for yourself."

"Then," George said, "you arrange to get yourself out of the way as soon as Lambert and Betty return. Meantime, if you go back on your word, I'll get hold of Lambert."

Dalrymple leant against the wall, morosely angry, restless, discouraged.

"I'll admit you could make some unpleasantness all around," he said, moistening his lips. "I wish I'd never touched your dirty money——"

George stepped into his room and closed the door.

VII

The awakening of the house to its most momentous day aroused George early, hurried him from his bed, sent him downstairs in a depressed, self-censorious mood, as if he and not Dalrymple had finished the caraffe. That necessary battle behind a locked door continued to fill his mind like the memory of a vivid and revolting nightmare. He fled from the increasing turmoil of an exceptional agitation, but he could not

escape his own evil temper. Even the flowering lanes where Goodhue and he had run so frequently during their undergraduate days mocked his limping steps, his heavy cane; seemed asking him what there was in common between that eager youth and the man who had come back to share a definite farewell with Betty; to stand, stripped of his veneer, against a wall to avoid a more difficult parting from Sylvia. There was one thing: the determination of the boy lived in the man, become greater, more headstrong, more relentless.

He paused and, chin in hand, rested against a gate. What about Wandel, who had admired the original George Morton? Would he approve of his threats to Dalrymple, of his probable course with the Planters? If he were consistent he would have to; yet people were so seldom consistent. It was even likely that George's repetition of Dalrymple's shocking insults would be frowned upon more blackly than the original, unforgiveable wrong. George straightened and walked back toward the house. It made no difference what people thought. He was George Morton. Even at the cost of his own future he would keep Sylvia from joining her life to Dalrymple's, and certainly Lambert could be made to understand why that had to be.

The warm sun cheered him a little. Dalrymple was scared. He wouldn't make George take any further steps. It was going to be all right. But why didn't women see through Dalrymple, or rather why didn't he more thoroughly give himself away to them? Because, George decided, guarded women from their little windows failed to see the real world.

Dalrymple obsessed him even when, after luncheon,

he sat with Lambert upstairs, discussing business chiefly. He wanted to burst out with:

"Why don't you wake up? How can you approve of this intimacy between your sister and a man like that?"

He didn't believe the other knew that intimacy had progressed; and when Lambert spoke of Dalrymple, calling attention again to his apparent reformation, George cleansed his mind a trifle, placing, as it were, the foundation for a possible announcement of a more active enmity.

"Don't see why you admire anything he does, Lambert. It isn't particularly pleasant for me to have you, for I've been watching him, and I've quite made up my mind. You asked me when I first got home if I wouldn't meet him halfway. I don't fancy he'd ever start in my direction, but if he did I wouldn't meet him. Sorry. That's definite. I must use my own judgment even where it clashes with your admirations."

Lambert stared at him.

"You'll never cease being headstrong," he said. "It's rather safer to have any man for a friend."

George had an uncomfortable sense of having received a warning, but Blodgett blundered in just then with news from the feminine side of the house.

"Some people downstairs already, and I've just had word—from one of those little angels that talk like the devil—that Betty's got all her war-paint on."

"You have the ring?" Lambert asked George.

George laughed.

"Yes, I have the ring, and I shan't lose it, or drop it; and I'll keep you out of people's way, and tell you what to answer, and see generally you don't make an idiot of yourself. Josiah, if he faints, help me pick him up."

Blodgett's gardenia bobbed.

"Weddings make Josiah feel old. Say, George, you're no spring chicken yourself. I know lots of little girls who cry their eyes out for you."

"Shut up," George said. "How about a reconnaissance, Lambert?"

But they were summoned then, and crept down a side staircase, and heard music, and found themselves involved in Betty's great moment.

At first George could only think of Betty as she had stood long ago in the doorway of Bailly's study, and it was difficult to find in this white-clothed, veiled, and stately woman the girl he had seen first of all that night. This, after a fashion, was his last glimpse of her. She appeared to share that conception, for she carried to the improvised altar in the drawing-room an air of facing far places, divided by boundaries she couldn't possibly define from all that she had ever known. After the ceremony she smiled wonderingly at George while she absorbed the vapid and pattered remarks of, perhaps, a hundred old friends of the family. George, who knew most of them, resented their sympathy and curiosity.

"If they don't stop asking me about the war," he whispered to Blodgett during a lull, "I'm going to call for help."

Some, however, managed to interest him with

remarks about the rebirth of football. Green had been at Princeton all along, Stringham was coming back in the fall, and there were brilliant team prospects. Would George be able to help with the coaching? He indicated his injured leg. He hadn't the time, anyway. He was going to stick closer than ever to Wall Street. He fancied that Sylvia, who stood near him, resented the lively interest of these people. She spoke to him only when she couldn't possibly avoid it, glancing, George noticed, at Dalrymple who rather pointedly kept away from her. So far so good. Then Dalrymple did realize George would have his way. George looked at Sylvia, thinking whimsically:

"I shan't let anybody put you where you wouldn't bother to hate me any more."

He spoke to her aloud.

"I believe we're to have a bite to eat."

She followed him reluctantly, and during the supper yielded of herself nothing whatever to him, chatting by preference with any one convenient, even with Blodgett whom she had treated so shabbily. Very early she left the room with Betty and Mrs. Alston, and George experienced a strong desire to escape also, to flee anywhere away from this house and the bitter dissatisfactions he had found within its familiar walls. He saw Mrs. Bailly and took her hand.

"I want to go home with you and Squibs to-night."

Mrs. Bailly smiled her gratitude, but as he was about to move away she stopped him with a curiosity he had not expected from her.

"Isn't Sylvia Planter beautiful? Why do you suppose she doesn't marry?"

George laughed shortly, shook his head, and hurried upstairs to Lambert's room; yet Mrs. Bailly had increased his uneasiness. Perhaps it was the too-frequent repetition of that question that had made Sylvia turn temporarily to Blodgett; that was, possibly, focussing her eyes on Dalrymple now; yet why, from such a field, did she choose these men? What was one to make of her mind and its unexpected reactions? The matter of marriage was, not unnaturally, in the air here. Lambert faced him with it.

"Josiah's right. When are you going to make a home, Apollo Morton?"

George turned on him angrily, not bothering to choose his words.

"Such a question from you is ridiculous. You've not forgotten the dark ages either."

Lambert looked at him for a moment affectionately, not without sympathy.

"Don't be an ass, George."

George's laughter was impatient.

"Don't forget, Lambert, your old friends, Corporal Sol Roseberg, and Bugler Ignatius Chronos. No men better! Chairs at the club! Legs under the table at Oakmont——"

Lambert put his hands on George's shoulders.

"It isn't that at all. You know it very well."

"What is it then?" George asked, sharply.

"Don't pretend ignorance," Lambert answered, "and it

must be your own fault. Whose else could it possibly be? And I'm sorry, have been for years."

"It isn't my fault," George said. "The situation exists. I'm glad you recognize it. You'll understand it's a subject I can't let you joke about."

"All right," Lambert said, "but I wonder why you're always asking for trouble."

VIII

Betty had plenty of colour to-night. As she passed George, her head bent against the confetti, he managed to touch her hand, felt a quick responsive pressure, heard her say:

"Good-bye, George."

The whispered farewell was like a curtain, too heavy ever to be lifted again, abruptly let down between two fond people.

IX

Unexpectedly the companionships of the little house in Dickinson Street failed to lighten George's discontented humour. Mrs. Bailly's question lingered in his mind, coupling itself there with her disappointment that he, instead of Lambert, hadn't married Betty; and, when she retired, the tutor went back to his unwelcome demands of the day before. Hadn't George made anything of his great experience? Was it possible it had left him quite unchanged? What were his immediate plans, anyway?

"You may as well understand, sir," George broke in,

impatiently, "that I am going to stay right in Wall Street and make as much money and get as much power as I can."

"Why? In the name of heaven, why?" Bailly asked, irritably. "You are already a very rich man. You've dug for treasure and found it, but can you tell me you've kept your hands clean? Money is merely a conception—a false one. Capitalism will pass from the world."

George grunted.

"With the last two surviving human beings."

"Mockery won't keep you blind always," Bailly said, "to the strivings of men in the mines and the factories ——"

"And in the Senate and the House," George jeered, "and in Russia and Germany, and in little, ambitious corners. If you're against the League of Nations it's because, like all those people, you're willing Rome should burn as long as personal causes can be fostered and selfish schemes forwarded. No agitator, naturally, wants the suffering world given a sedative ——"

Bailly smiled.

"Even if you're wrong-headed, I'm glad to hear you talk that way. At last you're thinking of humanity."

"I'm thinking of myself," George snapped.

Bailly shook his head.

"I believe you're talking from your heart."

"I'm talking from a smashed leg," George cried, "and

I'm sleepy and tired and cross, and I guess I'd better go to bed."

"It all runs back to the beginning," Bailly said in a discouraged voice. "I'm afraid you'll never learn the meaning of service."

George sprang up, wincing. Bailly's wrinkled face softened; his young eyes filled with sympathy.

"Does that wound still bother you, George?"

"Yes, sir," George answered, softly. "I guess it bothers as much as it ever did."

X

One virtue of the restlessness of which Bailly had reminded him was its power to swing George's mind for a time from his unpleasant understanding with Dalrymple. It had got even into Blodgett's blood.

"About the honestest man I can think of these days," he complained to George one morning, "is the operator of a crooked racing stable. All the cards are marked. All the dice are loaded. If they didn't have to let us in on some of the tricks, we'd go bust, George, my boy."

"You mean we're crooked, too?" George asked.

"Only by infection," Blodgett defended himself, "but honest, George, I'd sell out if I could. I'm disgusted."

George couldn't hide a smile.

"In the old days when you were coming up, you never did anything the least bit out of line yourself?"

Blodgett mopped his face with one of his brilliant

handkerchiefs. His eyes twinkled.

"I've been shrewd at times, George, but isn't that legitimate? I may have made some crowds pretty sick by cutting under them, but that's business. I won't say I haven't played some cute little tricks with stocks, but that's finesse, and the other fellow had the same chance. I'm not aware that I ever busted a bank, or held a loaded gun to a man's head and asked him to hand over his clothes as well as his cash. That's the spirit we're up against now. That's why Papa Blodgett advises selling out those mill stocks we kept big blocks of at the time of the armistice."

"They're making money," George said.

Blodgett tapped a file of reports.

"Have you read the opinions of the directors?"

"Yes," George answered, "and at a pinch they might have to go into coöperation, but they'd still pay some dividends."

Blodgett puffed out his cheeks.

"You're sure the unions would want a share in the business?"

"Why not?" George asked. "Isn't that practical communism?"

"Hay! Here's a fellow believes there's something practical in the world nowadays! Sell out, son."

"Then who would run our mills?"

"Maybe some philanthropist with more money than brains."

"You mean," George asked, "that our products, unless conditions improve, will disappear from the world, because no one will be able to afford to manufacture them?"

Blodgett pursed his lips. George stared from the window at the forest of buildings which impressed him, indeed, as giant tree trunks from which all the foliage had been stripped. Had there been awakened in the world an illiberal individuality with the power to fell them every one, and to turn up the system out of which they had sprung as from a rich soil? Was that what he had helped fight the war for?

"You're talking about the dark ages," he said, feeling the necessity of faith and stability. "Sell your stocks if you want, I choose to keep mine."

Blodgett yawned.

"We'll go down together, George. I won't jump from a sinking ship as long as you cling to the bridge."

"The ship isn't sinking," George cried. "It's too buoyant."

XI

Wandel and Goodhue came home, suffering from this universal restlessness.

"Ah, *mon* brave!" Wandel greeted George. "*Mon vieux Georges, grand et incomparable!* So the country's dry! Jewels are cheaper than beefsteaks! Congress is building spite fences! None the less, I'm glad to be home."

"Glad enough to have you," George said. "I'm not sure we won't go back to our bargain pretty soon. I'm

about ready for a pet politician."

"Let me get clean," Wandel laughed. "You must have a lot of money."

"I can control enough," George said, confidently.

"*Bon!* But don't send me to Washington at first. I don't want to put on skirts, use snuff, or practise gossiping."

For a time he refused to apply himself to anything that didn't lead to pleasure. Goodhue went at once to Rhode Island for a visit with his father and mother, while Wandel flitted from place to place, from house to house, as if driven by his restlessness to the play he had abandoned during five years. Once or twice George caught him with Rogers in town, and bluntly asked him why.

"An eye to the future, my dear George. Are you the most forgetful of class presidents? Perfect henchman type. When one goes into politics one must have henchmen."

But George had an unwelcome feeling that Rogers, eyes always open, was taking advantage, in his small way, of the world's unsettled condition. People were inclined to laugh at him, but they treated him well for Wandel's sake.

"Still in the bond business," he explained to George. "It isn't what it was befo' de war. I'm thinking of taking up oil stocks and corners in heaven, although I doubt if there are as many suckers as fell for P. T. B. Trouble nowadays is that the simplest of them are too busy trying to find somebody just a little simpler to sting. Darned if they don't usually hook one. Still bum securities are a great weakness with most

people. Promise a man a hundred per cent. and he'll complain it isn't a hundred and fifty."

George reflected that Rogers was bound for disillusionment, then he wasn't so sure, for America seemed more than ever friendly to that brisk, insincere, back-bending type. Out of the sea of money formed by the war examples sprang up on nearly every side, scarcely troubled by racial, religious, or educational handicaps; loudly convinced that they could buy with money all at once every object of matter or spirit the centuries had painstakingly evolved. One night in the crowds of the theatre district, when with Wandel he had watched the hysterical competition for tickets, cabs, and tables in restaurants where the prices of indigestion had soared nearly beyond belief, he burst out angrily:

"The world is mad, Driggs. I wouldn't be surprised to hear these people cry for golden gondolas to float them home on rivers of money. Stark, raving mad, Driggs! The world's out of its head!"

Wandel smiled, twirling his cane.

"Just found it out, great man? Always has been; always will be—chronic! This happens to be a violent stage."

XII

It was Wandel, indeed, who drew George from his preoccupation, and reminded him that another world existed as yet scarcely more than threatened by the driving universal invaders. George had looked in at his apartment one night when Wandel was just back from a northern week-end.

"Saw Sylvia. You know, George, she's turning back the years and prancing like a débutante."

George sat down, uneasy, wondering what the other's unprepared announcement was designed to convey.

"I'll lay you what you want," Wandel went on, lighting a cigar, "that she forgets the Blodgett fiasco, and marries before snow falls."

Had it been designed as a warning? George studied Wandel, trying to read his expression, but the light was restricted by heavy, valuable, and smothering shades; and Wandel sat at some distance from the nearest, close to a window to catch what breezes stole through. Confound the man! What was he after? He hadn't mentioned Sylvia that self-revealing day in France; but George had guessed then that he must have known of his persistent ambition, and had wondered why his unexpected communicativeness hadn't included it. At least a lack of curiosity now was valueless, so George said:

"Who's the man?"

"I don't suggest a name," Wandel drawled. "I merely call attention to a possibility. Perhaps discussing the charming lady at all we're a trifle out of bounds; but we've known the Planters many years; years enough to wonder why Sylvia hasn't been caught before, why Blodgett failed at the last minute."

George stirred impatiently.

"It was inevitable he should. I once disliked Josiah, but that was because I was too young to see quite straight. Just the same, he wasn't up to her. Most of all, he was too old."

"I daresay. I daresay," Wandel said. "So much for jolly Josiah. But the others? It isn't exaggeration to suggest that she might have had about any man in this country or England. She hasn't had. She's still the loveliest thing about, and how many years since she was introduced—many, many, isn't it, George?"

"What odds?" George muttered. "She's still young."

He felt self-conscious and warm. Was Wandel trying to make him say too much?

"Why do you ask me?"

Wandel yawned.

"Gossiping, George. Poking about in the dark. Thought you might have some light."

"How should I have?" George demanded.

"Because," Wandel drawled, "you're the greatest and most penetrating of men."

George's discomfort grew. He tried to turn Wandel's attack.

"How does it happen you've never entered the ring?"

Wandel laughed quietly.

"I did, during my school days. She was quite splendid about it. I mean, she said very splendidly that she couldn't abide little men; but any time since I'd have fallen cheerfully at her feet if I'd ever become a big man, a great man, like you."

Before he had weighed those words, unquestionably pointed and significant, George had let slip an impulsive question.

"Can you picture her fancying a figure like Dalrymple?"

He was sorry as soon as it was out. Anxiously he watched Wandel through the dusk of the room. The little man spoke with a troubled hesitation, as if for once he wasn't quite sure what he ought to reply.

"You acknowledged a moment ago that you had failed to see Josiah straight. Hasn't your view of Dolly always been from a prejudiced angle?"

"I've always disliked him," George said, frankly. "He's given me reasons enough. You know some of them."

"I know," Wandel drawled, "that he isn't what even Sylvia would call a little man, and he has the faculty of making himself exceptionally pleasant to the ladies."

"Yet he couldn't marry any one of mine," George said under his breath. "If I had a sister, I mean, I'd somehow stop him."

Wandel laughed on a sharp note, caught himself, went on with an amused tone:

"Forgive me, George. Somewhere in your pockets you carry the Pilgrim Fathers. Most men are shaggy birds of evil habit, while most young women are delicately feathered nestlings, and quite helpless; yet the two must mate. Dolly, by the way, drains a pitcher of water every time he sees a violation of prohibition."

"He drinks in sly places," George said.

"After all," Wandel said, slowly, "why do we cling to the suggestion of Dolly? Although I fancy he does figure—somewhere in the odds."

For a time George said nothing. He was quite convinced that Wandel had meant to warn him, and he had received that warning, straight and hard and painfully. During several weeks he hadn't seen Dalrymple, had been lulled into a sense of security, perhaps through the turmoil down town; and Lambert and Betty had lingered beyond their announced month. Clearly Wandel had sounded George's chief aim, as he had once satisfied himself of his origin; and just now had meant to say that since his return he had witnessed enough to be convinced that Dalrymple was still after Sylvia, and with a chance of success. To George that meant that Dalrymple had broken the bargain. He felt himself drawn irresistibly back to his narrow, absorbing pursuit.

"You're becoming a hermit," Wandel was saying.

"You've become a butterfly," George countered.

"Ah," Wandel answered, "but the butterfly can touch with its wings the beautiful Sylvia Planter, and out of its eyes can watch her débutante frivolities. Why not come away with me Friday?"

"Whither?"

"To the Sinclairs."

George got up and wandered to the door.

"By by, Driggs. I think I might slip off Friday. I've a mind to renounce the veil."

XIII

George fulfilled his resolution thoroughly. With the migratory bachelors he ran from house to house,

found Sylvia or not, and so thought the effort worth while or not. The first time he saw her, indeed, he appreciated Wandel's wisdom, for she stood with Dalrymple at the edge of a high lawn that looked out over the sea. Her hair in the breeze was a little astray, her cheeks were flushed, and she bent if anything toward her companion who talked earnestly and with nervous gestures. George crushed his quick impulse to go down, to step between them, to have it out with Dalrymple then and there, even in Sylvia's presence; but they strolled back to the house almost immediately, and Sylvia lost her apparent good humour, and Dalrymple descended from satisfaction to a fidgety apprehension. Sylvia met George's hand briefly.

"You'll be here long?"

The question expressed a wish.

"Only until Monday. I wish it might be longer, for I'm glad to find you—and you, Dalrymple."

"Nobody said you were expected," Dalrymple grumbled. "Everybody said you were working like a horse."

George glanced at Sylvia, smiling blandly.

"Every horse goes to grass occasionally."

He turned back to Dalrymple.

"I daresay you know Lambert and Betty are due back the first of the week?"

Sylvia nodded carelessly, and started along the verandah. Dalrymple, reddening, prepared to heel, but George beckoned him back.

"I'd like a word with you."

Sylvia glanced around, probably surprised at the sharp, authoritative tone.

"Just a minute, Sylvia," Dalrymple apologized uneasily. "Little business. Hard to catch Morton. Must grasp opportunity, and all that."

And when they were alone he went close to George eagerly.

"No need to wait for Betty and Lambert, Morton. It's done. Dolly's got himself thrown over——"

"I don't believe you," George said.

"Why not?"

"What are you doing here?" George asked. "It was understood you should avoid her."

Dalrymple's grin was sickly.

"Way she's tearing around now I'd have exactly no place to go."

"You seemed rather too friendly," George pointed out, "for parties to a broken engagement."

George fancied there was something of anger in the other's face.

"Must say I'm not flattered by that. Guess you were right. One heart's not smashed, anyway."

George turned on his heel. Dalrymple caught him.

"What about those notes?"

"I don't trust you, Dalrymple. I'll keep my eye on you yet awhile."

"Ask Sylvia if you want," Dalrymple cried.

George smiled.

"I wonder if I could."

He went to his room, trying to believe Dalrymple. Was that romance really in the same class as the one with Blodgett? If so, why did she involve herself in restive affairs with less obvious men? As best he could he tried to find out that night when she was a little off guard because of some unquiet statements she had just made of Russian rumours.

"You don't mean those things," he said, "or else you've no idea what they mean."

Through her quick resentment she let herself be caught in a corner, as it were. Everyone was preparing to leave the house for a dance in benefit of some local charity. Momentarily they were left alone. He indicated the over-luxurious and rather tasteless room.

"You're asking for the confiscation of all this, and your own Oakmont, and every delightful setting to which you've been accustomed all your life. You're asking for rationed food; for a shakedown, maybe, in a garret. You're asking for a task in a kitchen or a field. Why not a negro's kitchen; a Chinaman's field?"

He looked at her, asking gravely:

"Do you quite understand the principles of communism as they affect women?"

He fancied a heightening of her colour.

"You of all men," she said, "ought to understand the strivings of the people."

He shook his head vehemently.

"I'm for the palace," he laughed, "and I fancy it means more to me than it could to a man who's never used his brain. Let those stay in the hovel who haven't the courage to climb out."

"And you're one of the people!" she murmured. "One of the people!"

"You don't say that," he answered, quickly, "to tell me it makes me admirable in your eyes. You say it to hurt, as you used to call me, 'groom'. It doesn't inflict the least pain."

There was no question about her flush now.

"Tell me," he urged, "why you permit your brain such inconsistencies, why you accept such a patent fad, why you need fads at all?"

"Why won't you leave me alone?" she asked, harshly.

"You're always asking that," he smiled, "and you see I never do. Why are you unlike these other women? Why did you turn to Blodgett? Why have you made a fool of Dalrymple?"

She stared at him.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, why don't you come to me?"

He watched the angry challenge in her eyes, the deliberate stiffening of her entire body as if to a defensive attitude. He held out his hand to her.

"Sylvia! We are growing old."

Yet in her radiant presence it was preposterous to

speak of age. She drew away with a sort of shudder.

"You wouldn't dare touch me again——"

He captured her glance. He felt that from his own eyes he failed to keep the unsatisfied desire of years.

"I haven't forgotten Upton, either. When will you give me what I want, Sylvia?"

Her glance eluded him. Swiftly she receded. Through the open door drifted a growing medley of voices. She hurried to the door, but he followed her, and purposefully climbed into the automobile she had entered, but they were no longer alone. Only once, when he made her dance with him in a huge, over-decorated tent, did he manage a whisper.

"No more nonsense with Dalrymple or anybody. Please stop making unhappiness."

XIV

George returned to New York with an uneasy spirit, filled with doubt as to Dalrymple's statement of renunciation, and of his own course in saying what he had of Dalrymple to Sylvia. Mightn't that very expression of disapproval, indeed, tend to swing her back to the man? When Lambert walked in a day or two later George looked at the happy, bronzed face, recalling his assurance that Betty wasn't one to give by halves. Through eyes clouded by such happiness Lambert couldn't be expected to see very far into the dangerous and avaricious discontent of the majority. How much less time, then, would he have for George's personal worries? George, nevertheless, guided the conversation to Dalrymple.

"He's running down to Oakmont with me to-night," Lambert said, carelessly. "You know Betty's there with the family for a few days."

George hid his temper. There was no possible chance about this. Would Dalrymple go to Oakmont after the breaking off of even a secret engagement; or, defeated in his main purpose, was he hanging about for what crumbs might yet fall from the Planters' table. Nearly without reflection he burst out with:

"It's inconceivable you should permit that man about your sister."

Probably Lambert's great content forbade an answer equally angry.

"Still at it! See here. Sylvia doesn't care for you."

"I'm not talking of myself," George said. "I'm talking of Dalrymple."

With an air of kindness, undoubtedly borrowed from Betty, Lambert said easily:

"Stop worrying about him, then. Giving a friend encouragement doesn't mean asking him into the family. That idea seems to obsess you. What difference does it make to you, anyway, what man Sylvia marries? I'll say this, if you wish: Since I've had Betty I see things a bit clearer. I really shouldn't care to have Dolly the man. I don't think there's a chance of it."

"You mean," George asked, eagerly, "if there were you'd stop it?"

"I shouldn't like it," Lambert answered. "Naturally, I'd express myself."

"See here. Dalrymple isn't to be trusted. You've been too occupied. You haven't watched your sister. How can you tell what's in her mind? You didn't forecast the affair with Josiah, eh? There's only one way I can play my game—the thorough way. If it came to a real engagement I should have to say things, Lambert—things I'd hate myself for; things that would hurt me, perhaps, more than any one else. If necessary I shall say them. Will you tell me, if—if——"

Lambert smiled uneasily.

"You're shying at phantoms, but you've always played every game to that point, and perhaps you're justified. I'll come to you if circumstances ever promise to prove you right."

"Thanks," George said, infinitely relieved; yet he had an unpleasant feeling that Lambert had held his temper and had agreed because he was aware of the existence of a great debt, one that he could never quite pay.

XV

This creation of a check on Dalrymple and the assurance that Lambert would warn him of danger came at a useful time for George, since the market-place more and more demanded an undisturbed mind. He conceded that Blodgett's earlier pessimism bade fair to be justified. He watched a succession of industrial upheavals, seeking a safe course among innumerable and perilous shoals that seemed to defy charting; conquering whatever instinct he might have had to sympathize with the men, since he judged their methods as hysterical, grabbing, and wasteful.

"But I don't believe," he told Blodgett, "these strikes have been ordered from the Kremlin; still, other colours may quite easily combine to form red."

"God help the employers. God help the employees," Blodgett grumbled.

"And most of all, may God help the great public," George suggested.

But Blodgett was preoccupied these days with an Oakmont stripped of passion. George knew that Old Planter had sent for him, and he found something quite pitiful in that final surrender of the great man who was now worse off than the youngest, grimiest groveller in the furnaces; so he was not surprised when it was announced that Blodgett would shortly move over to the marble temple, a partner at last with individuality and initiative, one, in fact, who would control everything for Old Planter and his heirs until Lambert should be older. Lambert was sufficiently unhappy over the change, because it painted so clearly the inevitable end. The Fifth Avenue house was opened early that fall as if the old man desired to get as close as possible to the centre of turbulent events, hoping that so his waning sight might serve.

Consequently George had more opportunities of meeting Sylvia; did meet her from time to time in the evenings, and watched her gaiety which frequently impressed him as a too noticeably moulded posture. It served, nevertheless, admirably with the men of all ages who flocked about her as if, indeed, she were a débutante once more.

In these groups George was glad not to see Dalrymple often, but he noticed that Goodhue was

near rather more than he had been formerly, and he experienced a sharp uneasiness, an instinct to go to Goodhue and say:

"Don't. Keep away. She's caused enough unhappiness."

Still you couldn't tell about Goodhue. The very fact that he fluttered near Sylvia might indicate that his real interest lay carefully concealed, some distance away. He had, moreover, always stood singularly aside from the pursuit of the feminine.

George's first meeting with Betty since her return was coloured by a frank acceptance on her part of new conditions that revived his sense of a sombre and helpless nostalgia. All was well with Betty. If there had ever been any doubt in her Lambert had swept it away. Whatever emotion she experienced for George was, in fact, that of a fond sister for a brother; and George, studying her and Lambert, longed as he had never done to find some such eager and confident content. The propulsion of pure ambition slipped from his desire for Sylvia. With a growing wonder he found himself craving through her just the satisfied simplicity so clearly experienced by Lambert and Betty. Could anything make her brilliancy less hard, less headstrong, less cruel?

George cast about for the means. Lambert was on watch. There was still time—plenty of time.

He hadn't spoken again to Lambert about Dalrymple. There hadn't seemed any point, for Lambert was entirely trustworthy, and, since Betty and he lived for the present in the Fifth Avenue house, he saw Sylvia constantly. Their conversation instead when they met for luncheon, as they did frequently,

revolved about threats which a few years back they hadn't dreamed would ever face them. Blodgett, George noticed, didn't point the finger of scorn at him for holding on to the mill stocks. George wouldn't have minded if he had. They had originally cost him little, their total loss would not materially affect his fortune, and he was glad through them to have a personal share in the irritating and absorbing evolution in the mills. He heard of Allen frequently as a fiery and fairly successful organizer of trouble, and he sent for him when he thought the situation warranted it. Allen came readily enough, walking into the office, shorn of his London frills, but evidently retentive of the habit of keeping neat and clean. The eyes, too, had altered, but not obviously, letting through, perhaps, a certain disillusionment.

"What are you doing to my mills?" George wanted to know.

Allen, surprisingly, didn't once lose his temper, listening to George's complaints without change of expression while he wandered about, his eyes taking in each detail of the richly furnished office.

"The directors report that the men have refused to enter into a fair and above-board coöperative arrangement, and we've figured all along it was turning the business over to them; taking money out of our own pockets. It's a form of communism, and they throw it down. Why, Allen? I want this straight."

Allen paused in his walk, and looked closely at George. There was no change in his face even when he commenced to speak.

"A share in a business," he said, softly, "carries

uncomfortable responsibilities. You can't go to yourself, for instance, and say: 'Give me more wages —more than the traffic will bear; then you sweat about it in your office, but don't bother me in my cottage.'"

"You acknowledge it!" George cried.

Allen's face at last became a trifle animated.

"Why not—to you? Everybody's out to get it—the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. The capitalist most of all. Why not the man that turns the wheels?"

George whistled.

"You'd crush essential industries off the face of the earth! You'd go back to the stone age!"

"Not," Allen answered, slowly, "as long as the profits of the past can be got out of somebody's pockets."

"You'd grab capital!"

"Like a flash; and what are you going to do about it?"

"I'll tell you what I am going to do," George answered, "and I fancy a lot of others will follow my example. I am going to get rid of those stocks if I have to throw them out of the window, then you'll have no gun to hold at my head."

"Throw too much away," Allen warned, "and you'll throw it all."

"The beautiful, pure social revolution!" George sneered. "You're less honest than you were when you dropped everything to go to London for me. What's the matter with you, Allen?"

Allen appraised again the comfortable room. Even now his expression didn't alter materially.

"Nothing. I don't know. Unless the universal spirit of grab has got in my own veins."

"Then, my friend," George said, pleasantly, "there's the door."

XVI

George found himself thinking and talking of Allen's views quite enough to please even Bailly. Blodgett, on the other hand, perhaps because of the heavy, settled atmosphere of the marble temple, had changed his tune.

"Things are bound to come right in the end."

As far as George was concerned he might as well have said:

"This marble surrounding me is so many feet thick. Who do you think is going to interfere with that?"

Something of quite a different nature bothered Lambert, and for a few days George thought it a not unnatural resentment at seeing Blodgett in his father's office, but Lambert took pains to awaken him to the truth, walking in one afternoon a few weeks after the Planters' move to town. He had an uncertain and discontented appearance.

"By the way, George," he said not without difficulty, "Dolly's about a good deal."

It was quite certain Lambert hadn't come to announce only that, so George shrank from his next words, confident that something definite must have

happened. He controlled his anxiety with the thought that Lambert had, indeed, come to him, and that Dalrymple couldn't permit the announcement of an engagement without meeting the fulfilment of George's penalties.

"It's been on my mind for the past week," Lambert went on. "I mean, he hasn't been seeing her much in public, but he's been hanging around the house, and last night I spoke to Sylvia about it, told her I didn't think father would want him any more than I did, pointed out his financial record, and said I had gathered he owed you no small sum——"

"You blind idiot!" George cried. "Why did you have to say that? How did you even guess it? I've never opened my mouth."

"He'd milked everybody else dry," Lambert answered, "and Driggs mentioned a long time ago you'd had a curiously generous notion you'd like to help Dolly if he ever needed it."

"It wasn't generosity," George said, dryly. "Go ahead. Did you make any more blunders?"

"You're scarcely one to accuse," Lambert answered. "You put me up to it in the first place, although I'll admit now, I'd have spoken anyway. I don't want Sylvia marrying him. I don't want him down town as more than a salaried man, unless he changes more than he has. I didn't feel even last night that Sylvia really loved him, but I made her furious, and you're right. I shouldn't have said that. I daresay she guessed, too, it wasn't all generosity that had led you to pay Dolly's debts. Anyway, she wouldn't talk reasonably, said she'd marry any one she pleased—oh, quite the young lady who sent me after you with

a horse whip, and I daresay she'd have been glad to do it again last night. I spoke to Mother. She said Sylvia hadn't said anything to her, but she added, if Sylvia wanted him, she wouldn't oppose her. Naturally she wouldn't, seeing only Dolly's good points, which are regularly displayed for the benefit of the ladies. Anyway, I agreed to tell you, and you promised, if it came to the point, you'd have some things to say to me——"

George nodded shortly.

"Yes, but I blame you for forcing me to say them. You've thrown them together——"

"I've always wanted to help Dolly as you would any old friend who had wandered a little to the side, and was anxious to get back on the path. I can't figure every man that comes about the place as a suitor for Sylvia. Let's forget all that. What are these important and unpleasant things you have to tell me? I daresay you know where the money you loaned Dolly went."

George pressed his lips tight. He frowned. Even now he hesitated to soil his hands, to divide himself, perhaps, permanently from Sylvia at the very moment of saving her; and he wasn't quite sure, in view of her pride and her quick temper, that his very effort wouldn't defeat its own purpose. If only Lambert hadn't made that worst of all possible blunders. He wondered how a man felt on the rack. He bent swiftly and picked up the telephone.

"I shall talk with Dalrymple first," he said. "I'm going to ask him to come over here at once. I think he'll come."

But Lambert shook his head, stopped him before he

could take the receiver from the hook.

"Isn't in the office. Hasn't been back since luncheon. Left no word then."

"Perhaps since you've come away——" George hazarded.

He telephoned, while Lambert wandered about the room, or paused to slip through his fingers the tape that emerged like a long and listless serpent from the now silent ticker. After a question or two George replaced the receiver and glanced at Lambert.

"You're right. Sticks to the job, doesn't he?"

"He isn't exactly an ordinary clerk," Lambert offered.

George walked to a window. For a long time he gazed over the lower city, turned singularly unreal by the early dusk, while it outlined itself little by little in yellow points of light which gave to the clouds and the circling columns of steam a mauve quality as if the world, instead of night, faced the birth of a dawn, new, abnormal, frightening.

He had to make one more effort with Dalrymple before sending Lambert to Sylvia with his reasons why she shouldn't marry the man. In the singular, unreal light he glanced at his hands. He had to see Dalrymple once more first——

He turned and snapped on the lights.

"What are you going to do?" Lambert asked. "There's no likely way to catch him down town."

A clerk tip-toed in. George swung sharply.

"What is it, Carson?"

"Mr. Dalrymple's outside, sir. It's so late I hesitated to bother you, but he said it was very important he should see you, sir."

George sighed.

"Wait outside, Carson. I'll call you in a moment."

And when the door was closed he turned to Lambert.

"I'm going to see him here—alone."

"Why?" Lambert asked, uneasily. "I don't quite see what you're up to. No more battles of the ink pots!"

"Please get out, Lambert; but maybe you'd better hang about the office. I think Dicky's gone for the night. Wait in his room."

"All right," Lambert agreed.

George opened the door, and, as Lambert went through reluctantly, beckoned the clerk.

"Send Mr. Dalrymple in, Carson."

He stood behind his desk, facing the open door. Almost immediately the doorway was blocked by Dalrymple. George stared, trying to value the alteration in the man. The weak, rather handsome face was bold and contemptuous. Clearly he had come here for blows of his own choosing, and had just now borrowed courage from some illicit bar, but he had taken only enough, George gathered, to make him assured and not too calculating. He was clothed as if he had returned from an affair, with a flower in his buttonhole, and a top hat held in the hand with his stick and gloves.

"Come in!"

Dalrymple closed the door and advanced, smiling.

Not for a moment did George's glance leave the other. He felt taut, hard to the point of brittleness.

"It's fortunate you've come," he said, quietly. "I've just been trying to get hold of you."

"Oh! Then Lambert's been here!" Dalrymple answered, jauntily.

George nodded.

"You've been crooked, Dalrymple. Now we'll have an accounting."

Dalrymple laughed.

"It's what I've come for; but first I advise you to hold your temper. It's late, but there are plenty of people still outside. Any more rough stuff and you'll spend the night in a cell, or under bail."

"If you lived nine lives," George commented, "you'd never be able to intimidate me."

Yet the other's manner troubled, and George's doubtful curiosity grew as he watched Dalrymple commence to draw the strings of the mask.

Dalrymple put down his hat and cane, bent swiftly, placed the palms of his hands on the desk, stared at George, his face inflamed, his eyes choked with malicious exultation.

"Your blackmail," he cried, "is knocked into a cocked hat. I married Sylvia half an hour ago."

Before George's response he lost some of his colour, drew back warily; but George had no thought of attacking him; it was too late now. That was why he

experienced a dreadful realization of defeat, for a moment let through a flickering impression of the need for violence, but—and Dalrymple couldn't be expected to understand that—violence against George Morton who had let this situation materialize, who experienced, tumbling about his head, the magnificent but incomplete efforts of many years. That sensation of boundless, imponderable wreckage crushing upon him sent him back to his chair where for a moment he sat, sunk down, stripped of his power and his will.

And Dalrymple laughed, enjoying it.

In George's overwhelmed brain that laughter started an awakening clamour.

"What difference does the money make now?" Dalrymple jibed. "And she'll believe nothing else you may tell her, and violence would only make a laughing stock of you. It's done."

"How was it done?" George whispered.

"No objections to amusing you," Dalrymple mocked. "Lambert interfered last night, and spoiled his own game by dragging you in. By gad, she has got it in for you! Don't see why you ever thought——Anyway, she agreed right enough then, and I didn't need to explain it was wiser, seeing how Lambert felt about it, and her father, and you, of all people, to get the thing over without any brass bands. Had a bit of luck ducking the reporters at the license bureau. Tied the knot half an hour ago. She's gone home to break the glad news."

He grinned.

"But I thought it only decent to jump the subway and

tell you your filthy money's all right and that you can plant a tombstone on your pound of flesh."

He laughed again.

In George's brain the echoes of Dalrymple's triumph reverberated more and more intelligibly. Little by little during the recital his slumped attitude had altered.

"In a way! In a way! In a way!" had sung through his brain, deriding him.

Then, as he had listened, had flashed the question: "Is it really too late?" And he had recalled his old determination that nothing—not even this—should bar the road to his pursuit. So, at the close of Dalrymple's explanation, he was straight in his chair, his hands grasping the arms, every muscle, every nerve, stretched tight, and in his brain, overcoming the boisterous resonance of Dalrymple's mirth, rang his old purposeful refrain: "I will! I will! I will!"

Dalrymple had married her, but it wasn't too late yet.

"Jealous old fellow!" Dalrymple chaffed. "No congratulations for Dolly. Blow up about your notes any time you please. I'll see they're paid."

He took up his hat and stick.

"Want to run along now and break the news to brother-in-law. Sure to find him. He's a late bird."

George stood up.

"Wait a minute," he said, quietly. "Got to say you've put one over, Dalrymple. It was crooked, but it's done. You've settled it, haven't you?"

"Glad you take it reasonably," Dalrymple laughed, turning for the door.

"Wait a minute," George repeated.

Dalrymple paused, apparently surprised at the tone, even and colourless.

"Lambert's somewheres about the place," George explained. "Just stay here, and I'll find him and send him in."

"Good business!" Dalrymple agreed, sitting down. "Through all the sooner."

He smiled.

"A little anxious to get home to my wife."

George tried to close his ears. He didn't dare look at the other. He hurried out, closed the door, and went to Goodhue's office. At sight of him Lambert sprang from his chair as if startled by an unforeseen record of catastrophe.

"What's happened?"

"Dalrymple's in my room," George answered without any expression. "He wants to see you. He'll tell you all about it."

He raised his hands, putting a stop to Lambert's alarmed questions.

"Can't wait. Do just one thing for me. Give me half an hour. Keep Dalrymple here for half an hour."

Still Lambert cried for reasons.

"Never mind why. You ought to interest each other for that long."

But Lambert tried to detain him.

"Where are you going? Why do you want me to keep him here? You look as if you'd been struck in the face! George! What goes on?"

George turned impatiently.

"Ask Dalrymple. Then do that one thing for me."

He ran out of the room, picked up his hat and coat, and hastened to the elevators.

He was caught by the high tide of the homeward rush, but his only thought was of the quickest way, so he let himself be swept into the maelstrom of the subway and was pounded aboard a Lexington Avenue express. All these people struggling frantically to get somewhere! The pleasures awaiting them at their journey's end should be colourful and compelling; yet it was clear to him sordid discontent lurked for some, and for others unavoidable sorrows. It was beyond belief that their self-centred haste should let creep in no knowledge of the destination and the purpose of this companion, even more eager than themselves, intimately crushed among them.

He managed to free his arm so he could glance at his watch, and he peered between bobbing heads through the windows at the station signs. At Eighty-sixth Street he escaped and tore, limping, up the stairs while people stared at him, or, if in his haste he had brushed unthinkingly against them, called out remarks angry or sarcastic. His leg commenced to ache, but he ran across to Fifth Avenue and down it to the Planter house. While he waited before the huge, heavy glass and iron doors he caught his breath, counting the seconds.

It was Simpson who opened.

"I'm not sure Miss Planter has returned, sir. If so, she would be upstairs. When she went out she said something about not being disturbed this evening. Yes, sir. She left with Mr. Dalrymple less than two hours ago."

George walked into the vast hall.

"I must see her, Simpson, at once."

He started toward hangings, half-drawn, through which he could see only partially a dimly lighted room.

"I will tell her, sir."

George swung.

"But not my name, Simpson. Tell her it is a message from her brother, of the greatest importance."

George held his breath.

"What is it, Simpson?"

The clear contralto voice steadied him. If she was alone in there he would have a better chance than he had hoped for, and he heard no other voice; but why should she be alone at this exciting hour in a dimly lighted room? Was it possible that she hadn't told any one yet what she had done, had returned to the house and chosen solitude, instead, in a dim light? Then why? Why?

He dismissed Simpson with a nod and entered between the hangings.

She was alone. She stood before a cold fireplace at the end of the room as if she had just risen from a

chair near by. She was straight and motionless, but she projected an air of fright, as if she had been caught at an indiscretion; and, as George advanced, he thought her colour was too deep, and he believed she had been crying alone in the dusk of the room which was scarcely disturbed by one shaded lamp.

He paused and stared at her—no longer Sylvia Planter—Dalrymple's wife. All at once the appearance of modelled stone left her. Her entire body seemed in motion, surrendered to a neurotic and undirected energy. She started forward, paused, drew away. Her eyes turned from him to the door, then questioningly back again. She pulled at the gloves which she had kept in her hand. Her voice, when she spoke, was unsteady:

"What do you mean—coming in here—unannounced?"

His eyes held her.

"I've had enough of that," he said, harshly. "All I can think of is the vile name your husband would have called you once if I hadn't choked him half to death."

For a second her eyes blazed, then her shoulders drooped, and she covered her face with her hands. With a sharp regret it occurred to him that he could throw the broken crop away, for at last he had struck her—hard enough to hurt.

Her voice from behind her hands was uncertain and muffled.

"Who told you?"

"He did—naturally, that—that——"

He broke off, choking.

"By God, Sylvia! It isn't too late. You've got to understand that. Now. This minute. I tell you it isn't too late."

She lowered her hands. Her fear was sufficiently visible. Her attempt at a laugh was pitiful, resembled an escaping grief.

"Leave me alone. You have to leave me alone now."

Her brutal definition of the great wall suddenly raised between them swept his mind clean of everything except her lips, her beauty, cloistered with his interminable desire in this dim room.

He stumbled blindly forward to his final chance. With a great, unthinking, enveloping gesture he flung his arms about her drew her so close to his body that she couldn't resist; and, before she had time to cry out, pressed his mouth at last against her lips.

He saw her eyes close, guessed that she didn't attempt to struggle, experienced an intoxicating fancy she was content to have him fulfill his boast. He didn't try to measure the enormity of his action. Once more he was the George Morton who could plunge ahead, casting aside acquired judgments. Then he felt her shudder. She got her lips away. She tried to lift her hands. He heard her whisper:

"Let me go."

He stared, fascinated, at her lips, half parted, that had just now told him he had never really wanted anybody else, never could have.

"Sylvia! Forgive me. I didn't know. I've loved you—always; I've never dreamed how much. And I can't let

you go."

He tried to find her lips again, but she fought, and he commenced to remember. From a point behind his back something held her incredulous attention. He turned quickly. Dalrymple stood between the hangings.

XVII

George experienced no fear, no impulse to release Sylvia. He was conscious merely of a sharp distaste that it should have turned out so, and a feeling of anger that Lambert was responsible through his failure to grant his request; but Lambert might have been shocked to forgetfulness by Dalrymple's announcement, or he might have had too sharp a doubt of George's intentions. Sylvia had become motionless, as if impressed by the futility of effort. In a moment would she cry out to Dalrymple just what he had done? He waited for her charge, her justification, while he continued to stare at Dalrymple's angry and unbelieving face which the gay flower in his button hole had an air of mocking. Dalrymple started forward.

"You see that, Lambert——"

Lambert, who must have been standing close behind him, walked into the room, as amazed as Dalrymple, nearly as shocked.

"Sylvia!"

George let Sylvia go. She sat down in the chair by the fireplace and looked straight ahead, her lips still half parted. Dalrymple hurried the length of the room and paused in front of her.

"Be careful what you say, Dalrymple," George warned him.

Dalrymple burst out:

"You'll not tell me what to say. What's this mean, Sylvia? Speak up, or——"

"Easy, Dolly," Lambert advised.

George waited. Sylvia did not cry out. He relaxed, hearing her say uncertainly:

"I don't know. I'm sorry. I——"

She paused, looked down, commenced pulling at her gloves again with the self-absorbed gestures of a somnambulist. George's heart leapt. She had not accused him, had really said nothing, from her attitude wouldn't just yet. Dalrymple swung furiously on Lambert.

"God! Am I to believe my eyes? Pretends to despise him, and I find her in his arms!"

Sylvia glanced up once then, her face crimson, her lips trembling, then she resumed her blank scrutiny of her gloves at which she still pulled. George stepped swiftly forward, fancying Dalrymple was going to threaten her with his hands.

"Why don't you talk up?" Dalrymple cried. "What you got to say? Don't see there's much? Never would have dreamed it of you. What a scandal!"

"Morton," Lambert said with a leashed fury in his quiet voice, "no one but you could have done this. Leave us alone now to see what we can make of it."

George laughed shortly.

"All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't budge me just yet. And I'll tell you what we'll make of it. Just what she wishes."

"Keep your mouth shut," Dalrymple said, shrilly. "You won't go. We'll go. Sylvia! Come with me. We'll talk it out alone."

She shrank back in her chair, grasped its arms, looked up startled, shaking her head.

"I can't go anywhere with you, Dolly," she said in a wondering voice.

"What you mean? You came to church right enough with me this afternoon. Don't you forget that."

She nodded.

"It was wrong of me," she whispered. "I lost my temper. I didn't know at all——"

"How did you find out?" Dalrymple sneered. "From him? But you're my wife. Come away with me——"

She stood up swiftly, facing him.

"You shan't say such things to me, and I am not coming with you. I don't know what's going to happen, but that—I know——"

She turned helplessly to Lambert.

"Make him understand."

Lambert took her hand and led her to the door.

"Go to Betty," he said.

"But make him understand," she pled.

"Why did you marry him if you didn't love him?"

Lambert asked.

She turned and glanced at Dalrymple.

"I was fond of him. I didn't quite realize. There's a difference—he must see that I've done an impossible thing, and I won't go on with it."

They were at the door. Lambert led her through, returning immediately. George watched her go, blaming himself for her suffering. He had, indeed, dragged her from her high horse, but he had not realized he would bring her at once and starkly face to face with facts she had all along refused to recognize; yet, he was convinced from his long knowledge of her, she would not alter her decision, and he was happy, knowing that he had accomplished, after a fashion, what he had come here to do.

"You're married," Lambert was saying dryly to Dalrymple. "The problem seems to be how to get you unmarried."

"You shan't do that," Dalrymple cried, hotly. "You'll talk her around instead."

"Scarcely a chance," Lambert answered, "and really I don't see why I should try. You've played a slippery trick. You may have had an understanding with Sylvia, but I am perfectly convinced that she wouldn't have let anything come of it if you hadn't caught her at a moment when she couldn't judge reasonably. So it's entirely up to her."

"We'll see about it," Dalrymple said. "I have my side. You turn nasty. I turn nasty. You Planters want an annulment proceeding, or a public divorce with this rotter as co-respondent?"

"Dolly! You don't know what you're saying."

"I'll fight for my rights," Dalrymple persisted, sullenly.

"See here," George put in, "I stayed to say one thing. Sylvia had nothing to do with what you saw. She couldn't help herself. Your crookedness, Dalrymple, made me forget everything except that——Never mind. Lambert understands. Maybe I was out of my head. Anyway, I didn't give her a chance. She had to suffer it. Is that quite clear?"

Lambert smiled incredulously.

"That'll sound well in court, too," Dalrymple threatened.

"Drop that!" Lambert cried. "Think who you are; who Sylvia is."

"My wife," Dalrymple came back. "I'll have her or I'll go to court."

George started for the door.

"Don't fret, Lambert," he advised. "Money will go a long way with him. If I might, I'd like to know what the two of you settle. I mean, if you want to keep it away from your father and mother, my money's available. I haven't much use for it any more——"

He broke off. What had he just meant to say: that since he had held Sylvia in his arms all that had marked the progress of his ambition had become without value? He would have to find that out. Now he waited at the door, interested only in Dalrymple's response to his bald proposal. Dalrymple thrust his hands in his pockets, commenced to pace the room, but all he said was:

"Teach you all not to make a fool of Dolly."

"Remember," George said. "What she wants. And undesired scandals can be paid for in various ways."

He glanced at Lambert. Evidently Sylvia's brother on that ground would meet him as an ally. So he left the house and walked slowly through the eastern fringe of the park, wishing to avoid even the few people scattered along the pavements of the avenue, for the touch of Sylvia's lips was still warm on his mouth. He felt himself apart. He wanted to remain apart as long as possible with that absorbing memory.

Her angry responses in the past to his few daring gestures were submerged in the great, scarcely comprehensible fact that she had not rebuked him when he had tumbled over every barrier to take her in his arms; nor had she, when cornered by Dalrymple and Lambert, assumed her logical defence. Had that meant an awakening of a sort?

He smiled a little, thinking of her lips.

Their touch had sent to his brain flashes of pure illumination in which his once great fondness for Betty had stood stripped of the capacity for any such avid, confused emotions as Sylvia had compelled; flashes that had exposed also his apparent hatred of the girl Sylvia as an obstinate love, which, unable to express itself according to a common-place pattern, had shifted its violent desires to conceptions of wrongs and penalties. Blinded by that great light, he asked himself if his ambition, his strength, and his will had merely been expressions of his necessity for her.

Of her words and actions immediately afterward he

didn't pretend to understand anything beyond their assurance that Dalrymple's romance was at an end. Not a doubt crept into his strange and passionate exaltation.

He was surprised to find himself at his destination. When he reached his apartment he got out the old photograph and the broken riding crop, and with them in his hands sat before the fire, dreaming of the long road over which they had consistently aided him. He compared Sylvia as he had just seen her with the girlish and intolerant Sylvia of the photograph, and he found he could still imagine the curved lips moving to form the words:

"You'll not forget."

He lowered his hands, and took a deep breath like one who has completed a journey. To-night, in a sense, he had reached the heights most carefully guarded of all.

XVIII

He heard the ringing of the door bell. His servant slipped in.

"Mr. Lambert Planter, sir."

George started, placed the crop and the photograph in a drawer, and looked at the man with an air of surprise.

"Of course, I should like to see him. And bring me something on a tray, here in front of the fire."

Lambert walked in.

"Don't mind my coming this way, George?"

"I'm glad I'm no longer 'Morton'," George said, dryly. "Sit down. I'm going to have a bite to eat."

He glanced at his watch.

"Good Lord! It's after ten o'clock."

"Yes," Lambert said, choosing a chair, "there was a lot to talk about."

Little of the trouble had left Lambert's face, but George fancied Sylvia's brother looked at him with curiosity, with a form of respect.

"I'm glad you've come," George said, "but I don't intend to apologize for what I did this evening. I think we all, no matter what our inheritance, fight without thought of affectations for our happiness. That's what I did. I love your sister, Lambert. Never dreamed how much until to-night. Not a great deal to say, but it's enormous beyond definition to think.

You have Betty, so perhaps you can understand."

Lambert smiled in a superior fashion.

"I'm a little confused," he said. "She's led me to believe all along she's disliked you; has kept you away from Oakmont; has made it difficult from the start. Then I find her, whether willingly or not—at least not crying out for help—in your arms."

"I had to open her eyes to what she had done," George answered. "I wasn't exactly accountable, but I honestly believe I took the only possible means. I don't know whether I succeeded."

"I fancy you succeeded," Lambert muttered.

George stretched out his hand, looked at Lambert appealingly.

"She didn't say so—she——"

Lambert shook his head.

"She wouldn't talk about you at all."

He waited while the servant entered and arranged George's tray.

"Of course you've dined?"

"After a fashion," Lambert answered. "Not hungry. You might give me a drink."

"I feel apologetic about eating," George said when they were alone again. "Don't see why I should have an appetite."

Lambert fingered his glass.

"Do you know why she didn't have you drawn and

quartered?"

"No. Don't try to create happiness, Lambert, where there mayn't be any."

"I'm creating nothing. I'm asking a question, in an effort to understand why she won't, as I say, mention your name; why she can't bear to have it mentioned."

"If you were right, if things could be straightened out," George said, "you—you could put up with it?"

"Easily," Lambert answered, "and I'll confess I couldn't if it were Corporal John Smith. I've been fond of you for a long time, George, and I owe you a great deal, but that doesn't figure. You're worthy even of Sylvia; but I don't say I'm right. You can't count on Sylvia. And even if I were, I don't see any way to straighten things out."

George returned to his meal.

"If you had taken the proper attitude," he scolded, "you could have handled Dalrymple. He's weak, avaricious, cowardly."

"Oh, Dalrymple! I can handle him. It's Sylvia," Lambert said. "In the long run Dolly agreed to about everything. Of course he wanted money, and he'll have to have it; but heaven knows there's plenty of money. Trouble is, the wedding can't be hushed up. That's plain. It will be in every paper to-morrow. We arranged that Dolly was to live in the house for a time. They would have been together in public, and Dolly agreed eventually to let her go and get a quiet divorce—at a price. It sounds revolting, but to me it seemed the only way."

George became aware of an ugly and distorted

intruder upon his happiness, yet Lambert was clearly right. Sylvia and Dalrymple, impulsively joined together, were nothing to each other, couldn't even resume their long friendship.

"Well?" George asked.

"Mother, Betty, and I talked it over with Sylvia," Lambert answered. "You see, we've kept Father in ignorance so far. He's scarcely up to such a row. Mother will make him wise very gently only when it becomes necessary."

"But what did Sylvia say?" George demanded, bending toward Lambert, his meal forgotten.

"Sylvia," Lambert replied, spreading his hands helplessly, "would agree to nothing. In the first place, she wouldn't consent to Dolly's staying in the house even to save appearances. I don't know what's the matter with her. She worried us all. She wasn't hysterical exactly, but she cried a good deal, which is quite unusual for her, and she seemed—frightened. She wouldn't let any one go near her—even Mother. I couldn't understand that."

George stared at the fire, his hands clasped. When at last he spoke he scarcely heard his own voice:

"She will get a divorce—as soon as possible?"

Lambert emptied his glass and set it down.

"That's just it," he answered, gloomily. "She won't listen to anything of the sort."

George glanced up.

"What is there left for her to do?"

Lambert frowned.

"Something seems to have changed her wholly. She declares she'll never see Dolly again, and in the same breath talks about the church and a horror of divorce, and the necessity of her suffering for her mistake; and she wants to pay her debt to Dolly by giving him, instead of herself, all of her money—a few such pleasant inconsistencies. See here. Why didn't you run wild yesterday, or the day before?"

"Do you think," George asked, softly, "it would have been quite the same thing, would have had quite the same effect?"

"I wonder," Lambert mused.

George arose and stood with his back to the fire.

"And of course," he said, thoughtfully, "you or I can't tell just what the effect has been. See here, Lambert. I have to find that out. I must see her once, if only for five minutes."

He watched Lambert, who didn't answer at first.

"I'll not run wild again," he promised. "If she'd only agree—just five minutes' talk."

"I told you," Lambert said at last, "she wouldn't mention your name or let any one else; but, on the theory that you are really responsible for what's happened, I'd like you to see her. You might persuade her that a divorce is absolutely necessary, the only way out. You might get her to understand that she can't go through life tied to a man she'll never see, while people will talk many times more than if she took a train quietly west."

"If she'll see me," George said, "I'll try to make it

plain to her."

"Betty has a scheme——" Lambert began, and wouldn't grow more explicit beyond saying, "Betty'll probably let you hear from her in the morning. That's the reason I wanted you to know how things stand. I'm hurrying back now to our confused house."

George followed him to the door.

"Dalrymple—where is he?" he asked.

"Gone to his parents. He'll try to play the game for the present."

"At a price," George said.

Lambert nodded.

"Rather well-earned, too, on the whole," he answered, ironically.

XIX

George slept little that night. The fact that Lambert believed him responsible for the transformation in Sylvia was sufficiently exciting. In Sylvia's manner her brother must have read something he had not quite expressed to George. And why wouldn't she mention him? Why couldn't she bear to have the others mention him? With his head bowed on his hands he sat before the desk, staring at the diminishing fire, and in this posture he fell at last asleep to be startled by Wandel who had not troubled to have himself announced. The fire was quite dead. In the bright daylight streaming into the room George saw that the little man held a newspaper in his hand.

"Is it a habit of great men not to go to bed?"

George stood up and stretched. He indicated the newspaper.

"You've come with the evil tidings?"

"About Sylvia and Dolly," Wandel began.

George yawned.

"I must bathe and become presentable, for this is another day."

"You've already seen it?" Wandel asked, a trifle puzzled.

"No, but what else should there be in the paper?"

Wandel stared for a moment, then carefully folded the paper and tossed it in the fireplace.

"Nothing much," he answered, lighting a cigarette, "except hold-ups, murders, new strikes, fresh battles among our brethren of the Near East—nothing of the slightest consequence. By by. Make yourself, great man, fresh and beautiful for the new day."

XX

George wondered why Wandel should have come at all, or, having come, why he should have left in that manner; and he was sorry he had answered as he had, for Wandel invariably knew a great deal, more than most people. In this case he had probably come only to help, but in George's brain nothing could survive for long beyond hazards as to what the morning might develop. Betty was going to communicate with him, and she would naturally

expect to find him at his office, so he hurried down town and waited, forcing himself to the necessary details of his work. For the first time the mechanics of making money seemed dreary and unprofitable.

Goodhue came in with a clearly designed lack of curiosity. Had his partner all along suspected the truth, or had Wandel been talking? For that matter, did Goodhue himself experience a sense of loss?

"Not so surprising, George. Dolly's always been after her—even back in the Princeton days, and she's played around with him since they were children; yet I was a little shocked. I never thought it would quite come off."

It was torture for George to listen, and he couldn't possibly talk about it, so he led Goodhue quite easily to the day's demands; but Blodgett appeared not long after with a drooping countenance. Why did they all have to come to him to discuss the unannounced wedding of Sylvia Planter?

"She ought to have done better," Blodgett disapproved funereally.

He fingered a gaudy handkerchief. He thrust it in his pocket, drew it forth again, folded it carefully with his pudgy hands.

"Don't think I've ever ceased to regret——" he started rather pitifully.

After a moment's absorbed scrutiny of George he went on.

"If she had picked somebody like you I wouldn't have minded. Papa Blodgett would have given you both his blessing."

So they had all guessed something! George questioned uneasily if Blodgett's suspicions had lived during the course of his own unfortunate romance, and he was sorrier than ever he had had to help destroy that. He got rid of Blodgett and refused to see any one else, but he had to answer the telephone, for that would almost certainly be Betty's means of communication. Each time the pleasant bell tinkled he seized the receiver, and each time cut short whatever masculine worries reached him. The uneven pounding of the ticker punctuated his suspense. It was a feverish morning in the market, but not once did he rise to glance at the tape which streamed neglected into the basket.

It was after one o'clock when he snatched the receiver from the hook again with a hopeless premonition of another disappointment. Then he heard Betty's voice, scarcely more than an anxious whisper "George!"

"Yes, yes, Betty."

"My car will be somewhere between Altman's and Tiffany's at two o'clock, as near the corner of Thirty-fifth Street as they'll let me get. Lambert knows. It's all right."

"But, Betty——"

"Just be there," she said, and must have hung up.

He glanced at his watch. He could start now. He hurried from the building, but there was no point in haste. He had plenty of time, too much time; and Betty hadn't said he would see Sylvia; hadn't given him time to ask; but she must have arranged an interview, else why should she care to see him at all,

why her manner of a conspirator?

He reached the rendezvous well ahead of time, but he recognized Betty's car just beyond the corner, and saw her wave to him anxiously. He stepped in and sat at her side. She laughed nervously.

"I guessed you would be a little ahead," she said as the car commenced to crawl north.

"Am I to see Sylvia?"

Betty nodded.

"Just once. This noon, before I telephoned, she acknowledged that she wanted to see you—to talk to you for the last time. That's the way she put it."

Betty smiled sceptically.

"You know I don't believe anything of the sort."

"What do you think can be done?" George asked.

She didn't suggest anything, merely repeating her faith, going on while she looked at George curiously.

"So all the time, George—and I didn't really guess, but I might have known you would. I can remember now that day at Princeton when I asked you about her dog, and your anxiety one night at Josiah's when you wanted to know if she was going to be married—oh, plenty of hints now. George! Why did you let it go so far?"

"Couldn't help myself, Betty."

She looked at him helplessly.

"And what have you done to her?"

"If you can't guess——" George said.

Betty smiled reminiscently.

"Perhaps I can guess. You would do just that, George, when there was nothing else."

"You don't blame me?" he asked. "You don't ask, as Lambert did, why I waited so long?"

She shook her head.

"I'm sure," she said, "when you came last night you saw a Sylvia none of us had ever met before. Don't you think it had come upon her all at once that she was no longer Sylvia Planter, that in defeating you she had destroyed herself? If that is so, she has every bit of sympathy I'm capable of, and we must think first of all of her. The pride's still there, but quite a different thing. She's never known fear before, George, and now she's afraid, terribly afraid, most of all, I think, of herself."

George counted the corners, was relieved when beyond Fiftieth Street the traffic thinned and they went faster. He took Betty's hand, and found that the touch steadied and encouraged, because at last her fingers seemed to reach his mind again.

"Betty! Do you think she cares at all?"

"I'm prejudiced," Betty laughed, "but I think the harder she'd been the more she's cared; but she wouldn't talk about you except to say she would see you for a minute this once. Lambert's lunching with Dolly."

"We are conspirators," George said, "and I don't like it, but I must see her once."

They drew up at the curb, got out, and entered the hall. The house was peculiarly without sound. George glanced at the entrance to the room where he had found Sylvia last night.

"I think she's in Mr. Planter's study," Betty said. "He hasn't come downstairs yet."

She led him through the library to a small, square room—a quiet and comfortable book-lined retreat where Old Planter had been accustomed to supplement his work down town. George looked eagerly around, but the light wasn't very good, and he didn't at first see Sylvia.

"Sylvia!" Betty called softly. "I've brought George."

XXI

Almost before George realized it Betty was gone and the door was closed.

"Sylvia!"

Her low voice reached him from a large chair opposite the single, leaded, opaque window.

"I'm over here——"

Yes, there was fear in her enunciation, as if she groped through shadowy and hazardous places. It cautioned him. With a choked feeling, a racking effort after repression, he walked quietly around and stared down at her.

She looked up once quickly, then glanced away. He was grateful for her colour, but the fear was in her face, too, and the pride, as Betty had said, but a transformed pride that he couldn't quite understand.

She lay back in the large chair, her head to one side resting against the protruding arm. Her eyes were bright with tears she had shed or wanted to shed.

"Please sit down."

The ring of exasperated contempt and challenge had gone from her voice. He hadn't known it could stir him so. He drew up a chair and sat close to her.

"You are not angry about what I did last night?" he whispered.

She shook her head.

"I am grateful. I wanted to see you to tell you that, and how sorry I am—so beastly sorry, George."

Her voice drifted away. It made him want his arms about her, made him want her lips again. The room became a black and restless background for this shadowy, desired, and forbidden figure.

Impulsively he slipped to his knees and placed his head against the side of her chair. Across his hair he fancied a fugitive brushing of fingers. She burst out with something of her former impetuous manner.

"I used to want that! Now you shan't!"

He arose, and she stooped swiftly forward, as if propelled objectively, and, before he realized what she was doing, touched the back of his hand with her lips.

She sprang upright and faced him from the mantel, more afraid than ever, staring at him, her cheeks wet with tears.

"That's all," she whispered. "It's what I wanted to tell

you. Please go. We mustn't see each other again."

In the room he was aware only of her, but he knew, in spite of his own blind instinct, that between them was a wall as of transparent and heavy glass against which he would only break his strength.

"Sylvia," he whispered in spite of that knowledge, "I want to touch your lips."

"They've never been anybody else's," she cried in a sudden outburst. "Never could have been. I see that now. That's why I've hated you——"

"Yet you love me now. You do love me, Sylvia?"

"I love you, George," she said, wearily. "I think I always have."

"Then why—why——"

She turned on him, nearly angry.

"How can you ask that? You haven't forgotten that first day, either, have you? You took something of me then, and I couldn't forget it. That was what hurt and humiliated; I couldn't forget, couldn't get out of my mind what you—one of the—the stablemen—had taken of me, Sylvia Planter. And I thought you could never give it back, but last night you did, and I—— Everything went to pieces——And it had to be last night, after I'd lost my temper. I see that. That's the tragedy of it."

"I don't quite understand, Sylvia."

She smiled a little through her tears.

"Betty would. Any woman would. You must go now —please."

"When will I see you again?" he asked.

"This way? Never."

"What nonsense! You'll get a divorce. You must."

She straightened. Her head went back.

"I won't lie that way."

"I'll hit on some means," he boasted. "You belong to me."

"And I've found it out too late," she said, "and I don't believe I could have found it out before. Think of that, George, when it seems too hard. I had to be caught by my own rotten temper before I'd let you wake me up."

She drew a little away, and when he started forward motioned him back. Her face flooded with colour, but she met his eyes bravely.

"That was something. I will never forget that, either, but it doesn't make me feel—unclean, as I did that day at Oakmont and afterward. I don't want to forget it ever. Now you understand."

She ran swiftly to the door and opened it. He followed her and saw Betty at the farther end of the room talking to Mr. Planter.

"Why do you do that?" he asked, desperately.

"I want to tell you why I'll never forget," she answered in a half whisper. "Because I love you. I love you. I want to say it. I think it every minute, so don't you see you have to help me keep it straight and beautiful always, George?"

XXII

"Who has made my little girl cry?"

The quavering tones reminded George. He walked from the little room toward the others, and he saw that Old Planter had caught Sylvia's hand, had drawn her to him, had felt the tears on her cheeks.

There rushed back to George that ancient interview in the library at Oakmont, and here he was back at it, even in Old Planter's presence, making her cry again. He wondered what Old Planter had said when Lambert had told him who George Morton really was.

"You see, sir," he said, moodily, "I haven't changed so much from the stable boy, Morton, you once threatened to send to smash if——"

Sylvia broke in sharply.

"He's never been told——"

"What are you talking about?" the old man quavered. "Was there ever a Morton on my place, Sylvia? An old man, yes. He's dead. A young one——"

Slowly he shook his head from side to side. He peered suspiciously at George out of his dim eyes.

"I don't remember."

Suddenly he cried out with a flash of the old authority:

"I'm growing sensitive, Morton. No jokes! What's he talking about?"

Sylvia took his hand. Her lips trembled.

"Never mind, Father. Come."

And as he let her guide him he drifted on.

"Sylvia! Have you got everything you want? I'll give you anything you want if only you won't cry."

Outside rain had commenced to drizzle. From a tree in the little yard yellow leaves fluttered down. Old Planter hobbled into his study, Sylvia at his side. Betty followed George to the hall.

"Tell Sylvia I am very happy," he said.

She pressed his hand, whispering:

"The great George Morton!"

XXIII

Again George walked to his apartment and sat brooding over the fire, trying to find a way; but Sylvia must have searched, too, and failed. There was no way, or none that she would take. He crushed his heady revolt at the realization, for he believed she had been right. Without her great mistake she couldn't have given him that obliterative moment last evening, or his glimpse this afternoon of happiness through heavy, transparent glass. So he could smile a little, nearly cheerfully. There was really a quality of happiness in his knowledge that she had never forgotten his tight clasping at Oakmont, his blurted love, his threat that he would teach her not to be afraid of his touch. How she must have despised herself in the great house, among her own kind, when she found she couldn't forget Morton, when she tried, perhaps, to escape the shame of wanting Morton! No wonder she had

attempted through Blodgett and Dalrymple, men for whom she could have had no such urgent feeling, to divide herself from him, to prevent the fulfilment of his boasts of which he had perpetually reminded her. She must have looked at him a good deal more than he had guessed in those far days. And now his touch had taught her to be more afraid than ever, but not of him. With a growing wonder he recalled her surrender. Of course, Sylvia, like her placid mother, like everyone, was, beneath the veneer even of endless generations, necessarily primitive. For that discovery he could thank Dalrymple. He continued to dream.

What, indeed, lay ahead for him? In a sense he had already reached the summit which he had set out to find, and every thrilling mood of hers that afternoon flamed in his mind. He had a desolate feeling that there was no longer anything for him down town, or anywhere else beyond a wait, possibly endless, for Sylvia; and as he brooded there he longed for a mother to whom he could have gone with his happiness that was more than half pain. His mother had said that there were lots of girls too good for him. His father had added, "Sylvia Planter most of all." His father was dead. His mother might as well have been. All at once her swollen hands seemed to rest passively between him and the fire.

He was glad when Wandel came in, even though he found him without lights, for the second time that day in an unaccustomed and reflective posture.

"Snap the lamps on, will you, Driggs?"

Wandel obeyed, and George blinked, laughing uncomfortably.

"You'll fancy I've caught the poet's mood."

"Not at all, my dear George," Wandel answered. "Why not say, thinking about the war? Nobody will let you talk about it, and I'm told if you write stories or books that mention it the editors turn their thumbs down. So much, says a grateful country, for the poor soldier. What more natural then than this really pitiful picture of the dejected veteran recalling his battles in a dusky solitude?"

"Oh, shut up, Driggs. Maybe you'll tell me why they ever called you 'Spike.'"

Wandel yawned.

"Certainly. Because, being small, I got hit on the head a great deal. I sometimes think it's why I'm too dull to make you understand what I mean to say."

George looked at him.

"I think I do, Driggs; and thanks."

"Then," Wandel said, brightly, "you'll come and dine with me."

"I will. I will. Where shall we go? Not to the club."

"I fancy one club wouldn't be pleasant for you this evening," Wandel said, quietly.

George caught his breath.

"Why not?"

But Wandel wouldn't satisfy him until they were in a small restaurant and seated at a wall table sufficiently far from people to make quiet tones safe.

"It's too bad," he said then, "that great men won't

take warnings."

"I caught your warning," George answered, "and I acted on it as far as I could. I couldn't dream, knowing her, of a runaway marriage, and I'll guarantee you didn't, either."

"I once pointed out to you," Wandel objected, "that she was the impulsive sort who would fly to some man—only I fancied then it would ultimately be you."

"Why, Driggs?"

Wandel put his hand on George's knee.

"You don't mind my saying this? A long time ago I guessed she loved you. Even as far back as Betty's début, when I danced with her right after you two had had some kind of a rumpus, I saw she was a bundle of emotion and despised herself for it. Of course I hadn't observed then all that I have since."

"Why did you never warn me of that?" George asked.

Wandel laughed lightly.

"What absurd questions you ask! Because, being well acquainted with Sylvia, I couldn't see how she was to be made to realize she cared for you."

George crumbled a piece of bread.

"I daresay," he muttered, "you know everything that's happened. It's extraordinary the way you find out things—things you're not supposed to know at all."

Wandel laughed again, this time on a note of embarrassed disapproval.

"Not extraordinary in this case."

George glanced up.

"You said something about the club not being pleasant for me to-night——"

"Because," Wandel answered with brutal directness, "Dolly's been there."

George clenched his hands. Wandel looked at them amusedly.

"Very glad you weren't about, Hercules."

"It was that bad?" George asked.

"Why not," Wandel drawled, "say rather worse?"

"Drunk?" George whispered.

"A conservative diagnosis," Wandel answered. "His language sounded quite foreign, but with effort its sense could be had; and the rooms were fairly full. You know, just before dinner—the usual crowd."

"Somebody should have shut him up," George cried.

"We did, with difficulty, and not all at once," Wandel protested. "Dicky's taken him home with the aid of a pair of grinning hyenas. They did make one think of that."

"It's not to be borne," George muttered. "He ought to be killed."

"By all means, my dear George," Wandel agreed, "but we're back in New York. I mean, with the armistice murder ceased to be praiseworthy. They're punishing it in the usual fashion. You quite understand that, George?"

George tried to laugh.

"Quite. Go ahead."

"He really had some excuse," Wandel went on, "because when he first came in no one realized how bad he was—and they jumped him with congratulations and humour, and he went right out of his head—became stark, raving mad; or drunk, as you choose."

"What did he say?" George asked, softly.

Wandel half closed his eyes.

"Don't expect me to repeat any such crazy, disconnected stuff. It's enough that he let everybody guess Sylvia had sold him at the very moment he had fancied he had bought her. I've been thinking it over, and I'm not sure it isn't just as well he did. Everybody will talk his head off for a few days and drop it. Otherwise, curious things would have been noticed and suspected from time to time, and the talk, with fresh impetus, would have gone on forever. Besides, nobody's looking for much trouble with the Planters."

George had difficulty with his next question.

"He—he didn't mention me?"

"Why, yes," Wandel answered, gravely, "but rather incoherently."

"Rotten of him!"

"No direct accusations," Wandel hurried on, "just vile temper; and while it makes it temporarily more unpleasant that's just as well, too. The fact that people know what to expect kills more talk later. I suppose she'll manage a fairly quiet divorce."

"Won't listen to it," George snapped.

"How stupid of me!" Wandel drawled. "Of course she wouldn't."

He sighed.

"I mean to sympathize with you, my George, but all the time I envy you, and have to restrain myself from offering congratulations. Behold the oysters! They're really very good here."

George tried to smile.

"Then shall we talk about shell fish?"

"Bivalves, George. Or we might discuss the great strike. Which one? Take your choice. Or, by the way, have you received your shock yet? They're raising rents in our house more than a hundred per cent."

"The hell after war!" George grinned.

Wandel smiled back.

"Let us hope not a milestone on the road."

XXIV

Through pure will George resumed his routine, but it no longer had the power to capture him, becoming a drudgery without a clear purpose. Always he was conscious of the effort to force himself from recollection and imagination, to drive Sylvia from his mind; and, even so, he never quite succeeded. Were there then no heights beyond?

Lambert was painstakingly considerate, catching him for luncheon from time to time, or calling at unexpected moments at his office, and always he

said something about Sylvia. She was well. Naturally she was keeping to herself. Betty and she were at Princeton, and Sylvia was going to stay on with the Alstons for a time. Once he let slip a sincere admiration, a real regret.

"It's extraordinary, George. You've very nearly made every word good."

George took the opening to ask a question that had been in his mind for many days.

"Where is he? What's he up to? I haven't seen him, but, naturally, I keep to myself, too, and Dicky, bless him, mentions nothing."

Lambert frowned.

"He hasn't been around the office much since. He's taking his own sweet will with himself now. He's gone away—to Canada. It's cold there, but it's also fairly wet."

"If one could only be sure he had the virtue of loving her!" George mused.

"He hasn't," Lambert said, impatiently. "Since I talked with him that hectic night I've admitted that Dolly's never had the capacity to love any one except himself. So he's probably happy in his own unpleasant way."

A thought came to George. He smiled a little.

"I've been wondering if Sylvia is going in harder than ever on the side of the downtrodden."

Lambert laughed.

"As far as I know, hasn't mentioned a cossack since

that night; and I have to confess, hard-headed reactionary, the ranks are making me see too many bad qualities among the good."

"Perhaps," George suggested, "the ranks are saying something of the sort about us. Besides, I don't see why you call me reactionary."

"Would you have minded it a while back?" Lambert asked.

"Just the same," George answered, "I'd like to get their point of view."

What would Squibs say to that from him? Squibs, undoubtedly, would be pleased. After Lambert had gone he sat for a long time thinking. He was glad Lambert had come, for the other had suggested that in endeavouring to capture such a point of view, in pleasing Squibs, he might at last find a real interest, and one of use to somebody besides himself. If the men on the heights didn't get at it pretty soon, a different kind of climber would appear, with black hands, inflamed eyes, and a mind stripped, by passion, of all logic. Gladly he found it possible to bring to this new task the energy with which he had attacked the narrower puzzles of the university and Wall Street.

Sylvia had called him the most selfish person she had ever met, and, as he tried to strip from the facts of the world's disease the perpetual, clinging propaganda, he applied her charge to his soul. From the first he had been infected, yet his selfishness had been neither inefficient nor dangerous. This increasing pestilence was. Lambert guessed what he was at, and George jeered at him for his war madness, but Lambert had found again an absorbing

interest. Because of his missing leg it was rather pitiful to watch his enthusiasm for a reawakened activity.

"You've got to see Harvard swallow your old Tiger, George," he said one Friday. "After all, why not? You don't need to come out to the Alstons, although I'm not sure there would be any harm in that. Talk's about done, I fancy."

George flushed.

"Do you know I'd love to spill you again, Lambert? I'd like to bring you down so hard the seismographs would make a record."

"Too bad we can't try to kill each other," Lambert said, regretfully. "Why not watch younger brutes?"

"I've wanted it for days," George acknowledged. "I'll wire Squibs."

George was perfectly sure that Squibs knew nothing, for he wasn't socially curious, and Betty would have hesitated to talk about what had happened even to Mrs. Squibs, yet he was conscious, after the first moment of meeting, of a continued scrutiny from Squibs, of a hesitancy of manner, of an unusually careful choice of words.

He had small opportunity to test this impression, for it was noon when he reached the house in Dickinson Street, and there were many of the tutor's products in the dining-room, snatching a cold bite while they roared confused pessimism about the game.

"You're going to the side-lines," Squibs said when they had climbed the ramp to their section of the stadium.

"I'd be in the way," George objected.

Bailly stared at him.

"George Morton on a football field could only be in the way of Harvard and Yale."

George experienced a quick, ardent wish for thick turf underfoot, for a seat on the bench among players exhaling a thick atmosphere of eager and absorbed excitement. So he let the tutor lead him down the steps. Squibs called to Green, who was distrait.

"What is it, Mr. Bailly?"

"I've got Morton."

Green sprang to life.

"Mr. Stringham! An omen! An omen!"

He met George at the gate and threw his arms around him. Stringham hurried up. Green crowed.

"I believe we'll lick these fellows or come mighty close to it."

"Of course you'll lick them, Green. Hello, Stringham! May I sit down?"

"The stadium's yours," Stringham said, simply.

As he walked along the line of eager players, smothered in blankets or sweaters, George caught snatches of the curiosity of youth, because of nervousness, too audibly expressed.

"Who's the big fellow?"

"That? Longest kicker, fastest man for his weight ever played the game. George Morton—the great Morton."

"He never played with that leg! What's the matter with his leg? Football?"

George caught no answer. He sat down among the respectful youths, thinking whimsically:

"The war's so soon over, but thank God they can't forget football!"

XXV

At the very end of the first half, when the Princeton sections experienced the unforeseen glow of a possible victory, George caught a glimpse of Lambert and Wandel close to the barrier, as if they had left their places to catch someone with the calling of time. Just then the horn scrunched its anxious message. George called.

"Lambert Planter!"

Stringham paused, grinning.

"Come over here, you biting bulldog."

Lambert made his way through the barrier and grasped Stringham's hand.

"Come along to the dressing-room," Stringham suggested, cordially. "Nice bulldog, although once I loved to see Morton chew you up."

Lambert glanced down.

"Thanks. I'd better stay here. One of my runners is off, Stringham."

"Then sit with the boys next half," Stringham said. "Coming, Morton?"

George shook his head, and urged the anxious coach away, for Wandel had caught his eye.

"Tell them to keep their heads," George called after Stringham. "If they keep their heads they've got Harvard beaten."

He glanced inquiringly at Wandel.

"Why not cease," Wandel said, "imagining yourself a giddy, heroic cub? Come up and sit with mature people the last half."

The invitation startled George. Then Sylvia wasn't there?

"Is Sylvia all right?" he asked Lambert under his breath.

Lambert was a trifle ill at ease.

"Oh, quite. Betty asked us to get you. Wants to see you. Have my place. I'm going to accept Stringham's fine invitation, and sit here with the young—a possible Yale scout on the Princeton side-lines."

"Stringham's no fool," George laughed. "Anyway, he has you fellows beaten right now."

Lambert thrust his hand in his pocket.

"How much you got?"

Wandel grasped George's arm.

"Come with me before you get in a college brawl."

"Plenty when we're not chaperoned, Lambert," George called, and followed Wandel through the restless crowd and up the concrete steps.

Was Sylvia really there? Was he going to see her? The idea of finding him had sprung from Betty, and Lambert had been ill at ease.

He saw Betty and her father and mother, then beyond them, a vacant place between, Sylvia to whom the open air and its chill had given back all her dark, flushed brilliancy. Wandel slid through first, and made himself comfortable at Sylvia's farther side. George followed, stopping to speak to the Alstons, to accept Betty's approving glance.

"Conspirator!" he whispered, and went on, and sat down close to Sylvia, and yielded himself to the delight of her proximity. She glanced at him, her colour deepening.

"Betty said it was all right, and I must. So many people——"

The air was sharp enough to make rugs comfortable. He couldn't see her hands because they were beneath the rug across her knees, a covering she shared with Wandel and him.

As he drew the rug up one of his hands touched hers, and his fingers, beyond his control, groped for her fingers. He detected a quick, nervous movement away; then it was stopped, and their hands met, clasped, and clung together.

For a moment they looked at each other, and knew they mustn't, since there were so many people; but the content of their clasped hands continued because it couldn't be observed.

The supreme football player sat there staring at a blur of autumn colour between the lake and the generous mouth of the stadium; and, when the

second half commenced, saw, as if from an immeasurable distance, pygmy figures booting a football, or carrying it here and there, or throwing each other about; and he didn't know which were Harvard's men or which were Princeton's, and he didn't seem to care——

Vaguely he heard people suffering. A voice cut through a throaty and grieving murmur.

"Somebody's lost his head!"

"What's the matter?" he asked Sylvia.

"George! You're destroying my hand."

Momentarily he remembered, and relaxed his grasp, while she added quickly:

"But I don't mind at all, dear."

XXVI

Lambert stood in front of them, glancing down doubtfully. Evidently the game was over, for people were leaving, talking universally and discontentedly.

"Betty and I," Lambert said, dryly, "fancied we'd invented and patented that rug trick."

Sylvia stood up.

"Don't scold, Lambert."

She turned to George, trying to smile.

"I shall be happy as long as my hand hurts. Good-bye, George."

"You'd better go," Betty whispered as he lingered helplessly.

So he drifted aimlessly through the crowd, hearing only a confused murmur, seeing nothing beyond the backs directly in front of him, until he found the Baillys waiting at the ramp opening.

"If you'd only been there, George! Although this morning we'd have been glad enough to think of a tie score."

He submitted then to Bailly's wonder at each miracle; to his grief for each mistake; and little by little, as the complaining voice hurried on, the world assumed its familiar proportions and movements. He caught a glimpse of Allen walking slowly ahead. The angular man was alone, and projected even to George an air of profound dissatisfaction. Bailly caught his arm and shook hands with him.

"Whither away?" George asked.

"To the specials."

He fell in beside George, and for a time kept pace with him.

"What's bothering you, Allen?"

With a haggard air Allen turned his head from side to side, gazing at the hastening people.

"Lords of the land!" he muttered. "Lords of the land!"

"Why?" George asked. "Because they have an education? Well, so have you."

Allen nodded toward the emptying stadium.

"Lords of the land!" he repeated. "I've been sitting up there with them, but all alone. I wish I hadn't liked being with them. I wish I hadn't been sorry for

myself because I was alone."

Allen's words, his manner of expressing them, defined a good deal for George, urged him to form a quick resolution.

"Catch your special," he said, "but come to my office Tuesday morning. I may have work for you that you can do with a clear conscience. If you must get, get something worth while."

Allen glanced at him quickly.

"Morton, you've changed," he said. "I'll come."

XXVII

Very slowly the excitement of the game cleared from Squibs' brain. That night he could talk of nothing else, begging George for an opinion of each player and his probable value against Yale the following Saturday. George, to cover his confusion, generalized.

"We'll beat Yale," he said, "as we ought to have beaten Harvard, because this team isn't afraid of colours and symbols. Most of these youngsters have been in the bigger game, so final football matches no longer appeal to them as matters of life and death and even of one's chances in the hereafter."

Bailly looked slightly sheepish.

"I'm afraid, George, I'm going to New Haven to look at a struggle of life and death, but then I was only in the Y. M. C. A. I'd feel many times better if you were sound and available."

"You might speak to the dean about me," George

laughed.

By the next evening, however, the crowd had departed, and with Princeton's return to normal Squibs for the time overcame his anxieties. That night George and he sat in a corner of the lounge of the Nassau Club, waiting for Lambert and Wandel to drive in from the Alstons. George grew a trifle uncomfortable, because he suspected Squibs was staring at him with yesterday's curious scrutiny. Abruptly the tutor asked:

"What did you say to Allen after the game?"

"Offered him another job," George answered, shortly.

Bailly frowned.

"See here, George. What are you up to? Is that fair and decent? Allen is struggling—for the right."

"Allen," George answered, "has put some of his views to the test, and the results have made him discouraged and uneasy. He's been tainted by the very men he's tried to help. I've no idea of debauching him. Quite the reverse. Please listen."

And he entered upon a sort of penitence, speaking, while the tutor's wrinkled face flushed with pleasure, of his recent efforts to understand the industrial situation and its probable effects on society.

"I have to acknowledge," he said, softly, "that pure material success has completely altered its meaning for me. I'd like to use my share of it, and what small brains I have, to help set things straight; but I'm not so sure this generation won't have too sticky feet to drag itself out of the swamp of its own making."

Lambert and Wandel arrived just then, talking

cheerfully about football.

"What do you mean to do?" Bailly asked George as the others sat down.

George smiled at Wandel.

"I'm not sure, Driggs, that the hour hasn't struck for you."

Wandel raised his hands.

"You mean politics!"

"I used to fancy," George said, "that I'd need you for my selfish interests. Now my idea is quite different."

He turned to Squibs.

"See here, sir. You've got to admit that the soul of the whole thing is education. I don't mean education in the narrow sense that we know it here or in any other university. I mean the opening of eyes to real communal efficiency; the comprehension of the necessity of building instead of tearing down; the birth of the desire to climb one's self rather than to try to make stronger men descend."

Bailly's eyes sparkled.

"I don't say you're not right, George. You may be right."

A fire blazed comfortably in front of them. The chairs were deep. Through a window the Holder tower, for all its evening lack of definition, seemed an indestructible pointer of George's thoughts. For a long time he talked earnestly.

"I climbed," he ended. "So others can, and less selfishly and more usefully, if they're only told how;

if they'll only really try."

"You're always right, great man," Wandel drawled, "but we mustn't forget you climbed from fundamentals. That's education—the teaching of the fundamentals."

"It means an equal chance for everybody," George said, "and then, by gad, we won't have the world held back by those who refuse to take their chance. We won't permit the congenitally unsound to set the pace for the healthy. We'll take care of the congenitally unsound."

He turned to Bailly.

"And you and your excitable socialists have got to realize that you can't make the world sane through makeshifts, or all at once, but with foresight it can be done. You've raised the devil with me ever since I was a sub-Freshman about service and the unsound and the virtue of soiled clothing. Now raise the devil with somebody else about the virtue of sound service and clean clothes. This education must start in the schools. We may be able to force it into public schools through the legislatures; but in Princeton and the other great universities it has to come from within, and that's hard; that, in a way, is up to you and other gentle sectarians like you. And your clubs have got to stand in some form—everywhere, if only as objectives of physical and intellectual content. Nothing good torn from the world! Only the evil ——"

He tapped Wandel's arm.

"Driggs! If you want to go among the time-servers, to stand alone for the people; perhaps for people yet

unborn——"

"For a long time," Wandel said, "I've been looking for something I could really want to do. I rather fancy you've found it for me, George. I want to climb, too, always have—not to the heights we once talked about at your unhealthy picnic, but to the furtherest heights of all, which are guarded by selfishness, servility, sin—past which people have to be led."

Squibs cried out enthusiastically.

"And from which you can look down with a clear conscience on the climbers to whom you will have pointed out the path."

"I see now," Lambert put in, "that that is the only way in which one with self-respect can look down on lesser men."

George laughed aloud.

"An ally that can't escape! Driggs is a witness. We'll hold that fine democracy of the Argonne over your head forever."

"You see," Wandel drawled, "that was bound to fail, because it was based on the ridiculous assumption that every man that fought was good and great."

"I fancy," George said, "we're commencing to find out why we went to war—To appreciate the world's and our own astigmatism."

As they walked back to the little house in Dickinson Street, Bailly tried to express something.

"I guess," he managed, "that I'll have to call it square, George."

"I'm glad," George said, quickly, "but you must give some of the credit to Lambert Planter's sister."

He smiled happily, wistfully.

"You know she's the most useful socialist of you all."

After a time he said under his breath:

"There are some things I never dreamed of being able to repay you, sir. For instance this—this feeling that one is walking home."

"That debt," Bailly said, brightly, "cancels itself."

His mood changed. He spoke with a stern personal regret.

"You young men! You young men! How much farther you see! How much more you can do!"

XXVIII

George returned to New York happy in his memory of his intimate hour on a crowded stand with Sylvia. Dalrymple had given him that, too. It amazed him that so much beauty could spring from so ugly a source.

He heard that Dalrymple was back from Canada, then that he had wandered away, pockets full, on another journey, pandering to his twisted conception of pleasure. One day George took his notes from the safe-deposit box and gave them to Lambert.

"Get them back to him," he said.

And Lambert must have understood that George would never let the Planters' money redeem them.

"It's pretty decent, George."

"It's nothing of the kind. They make my hands feel dirty, and I've lots of money, and I'm making more every day; yet I wonder if it's going to be enough, even with Driggs' and Blodgett's and yours, old Argonne democrat."

For he had spoken of his plans to Blodgett, and had been a little surprised to learn how much thought Blodgett had given the puzzle himself, although most of his searching had been for makeshifts, for anything to tide over immediate emergencies.

"I don't know," Blodgett roared, "whether this cleaning out the sore and getting to the bottom of it will work or not; but I'm inclined to look to the future with you for a permanent cure. Anyway, I'd help you finance a scheme to make the ocean dry, because you usually get what you're after. So we'll send Wandel and Allen and some more as a little leaven to Albany and to that quilting party in Washington. I don't envy them, though."

George realized that his content could be traced to this new interest, as that went back to Sylvia. He had at last consciously set out to explore the road of service. For the first time in his life, with his eyes open, he was working for others, yet he never got rid of the sense of a great personal need unfulfilled; always in his heart vibrated the cry for Sylvia, but he knew he mustn't try to see her, for Betty would have let him know, and Betty hadn't sent for him again.

After the holidays, at the urging of Wandel and Lambert, he showed himself here and there, received at first curious glances, fancied some people slightly self-conscious, then all at once found himself

welcomed on the old frank and pleasant basis. Yes, the talk had pretty well died, and men and women were inclined to like Sylvia Planter and George Morton better than they did Dalrymple.

He saw Dalrymple in the club one stormy January evening. He hadn't heard he was in town, and examined him curiously as he sat alone in a corner, making a pretence of reading a newspaper, but really looking across the room at the fire with restless eyes. George, prepared as he had been, was surprised by the haggard, flushed countenance, and the neurotic symptoms, nearly uncontrollable.

Beyond question Dalrymple saw him, and pretended that he didn't. Heartily glad of that, George joined a group about the fireplace, and after a few minutes saw Dalrymple rise and wander unevenly from the room.

George met him several times afterward under similar circumstances, and always Dalrymple shortly disappeared, because, George thought, of his arrival; but other people tactfully put him straight. Dalrymple, it seemed, remained in no public place for long, as if there was something evilly secretive to call him perpetually away.

Wandel told him toward the end of the month that Dalrymple was about to make a trip to Havana for the remainder of the winter.

"Where there's horse-racing, gambling, and unlimited alcohol—where one may sin in public. Why talk about it? Although he doesn't mean to, George, he's in a fair way of doing you a favour."

But George didn't dream how close Dalrymple's

offering was. His first thought, indeed, was for Sylvia when the influenza epidemic of January and February promised for a time to equal its previous ugly record. Lambert tried to laugh his worry away.

"She's going south with father and mother very soon. Anyway, she hasn't the habit of catching things."

And it was Lambert a day or two later who brought him the first indication of the only way out, and he tried to tell himself he mustn't want it. Even though he had always despised Dalrymple and his weakness, even though Dalrymple stood between him and his only possible happiness, he experienced a disagreeable and reluctant sense of danger in such a solution.

"All his life," Lambert was saying, "Dolly's done everything he could to make himself a victim."

"Where is he?" George asked.

"At his home. It's fortunate he hadn't started south."

"Or," George said, "he should have started sooner."

"I've an uncomfortable feeling," Lambert mused, "that he was planning to run away from this very chance. Put it off a little too long. Seems he went to bed four days ago. I didn't know until to-day because you see he's been a little outcast since that scene in the club. He sent for me this afternoon, and, curiously enough, asked for you. Will you go up? I really think you'd better."

But George shrank from the thought.

"I don't want to be scolded by a man who is possibly dying."

"Let's hope not," Lambert said. "You'll go. Around five o'clock."

George hesitated.

"Did he ask for Sylvia?"

"He didn't ask me, but I telephoned her."

"Why?" George asked, sharply.

"Every card on the table now, George!" Lambert warned. "We have to think of the future, in case——"

"Of course, you're right," George answered. "I'm sorry, and I'll go."

When he entered the Dalrymple house at five o'clock he came face to face with Sylvia in the hall. He had never seen her so controlled, and her quiet tensity frightened him.

"Lambert told me," she whispered, "you were coming now. Dolly hasn't asked for me, but I'd feel so much better—if things should turn out badly, for I'm thinking with all my heart of the boy I used to be so fond of, and it's, perhaps, my fault——"

"It is not your fault," George cried. "He's always asked for it. Lambert will tell you that."

George relaxed. Dalrymple's mother came down the stairs with the doctor, and George experienced a quick sympathy for the retiring, elderly woman he had scarcely seen before. She gave Sylvia her hand, while George stepped out with the physician. In reply to George's questions the quiet man shook his head and frowned.

"If it were any one else of the same age—I've

attended in this house many years, Mr. Morton, and I've watched him since he was a child. I've marvelled how he's got so far."

He added brutally:

"Scarcely a chance with the turn its taking."

"If there's anything," George muttered, "any great specialist anywhere——Understand money doesn't figure——"

"Everything possible is being done, Mr. Morton. I'm truly sorry, but I can tell you it's quite his own fault."

So even this cold-blooded practitioner had heard the talk, and sympathized, and not with Dalrymple. A trifle dazed George reëntered the house.

"It's good of you to come, Mr. Morton," Mrs. Dalrymple said. "Shall we go upstairs now?"

There was no bitterness in her voice, and she had taken Sylvia's hand, yet undoubtedly she knew everything. Abruptly George felt sorrier for Dalrymple than he had ever done.

"Please wait, Sylvia," she said.

He followed Mrs. Dalrymple upstairs and into the sick-room.

"It's Mr. Morton, dear."

She beckoned to the nurse, and George remained in the room alone with the feverish man in the bed. He walked over and took the hot hand.

"Morton!" came Dalrymple's hoarse voice, "I believe you're sorry for me!"

"I am sorry," George said, quietly, "and you must get well."

Dalrymple shook his head.

"I know all the dope, and I guess I'm off in a few days. Not so bad now I can't talk a little and sorta clean one or two things up. No silly deathbed repentance. I'm jealous of you, Morton; always have been, because you were getting things I couldn't, and I figured from the first you were an outsider."

The dry lips smiled a little.

"When you get like this it makes a lot of difference, doesn't it, how you came into the world? I'll be the real outsider in a few days——"

"Don't talk that way."

A quick temper distorted Dalrymple's face.

"They oughtn't to bring a man into the world as I was brought, without money."

George couldn't think of anything to say, but Dalrymple hurried on:

"I wanted to thank you for the notes. Don't have to leave those to my family, anyway. And I'm not sure hadn't better apologize all 'round. I don't forget I've had raw deal—lots of ways; but no point not saying Sylvia had pretty raw one from Dolly. Lucky escape for her—mean Dolly's not domestic animal, and all that."

George was aware of a slight shiver as Dalrymple's hoarse voice slipped into its old, not quite controlled mannerisms.

"Mean," Dalrymple rambled on, "Dolly won't haunt anybody. Blessings 'n' sort of thing. Best thing, too. Sorry all 'round. That's all. Thanks coming, George."

And all George could say was:

"You have to get well, Dolly."

But Dalrymple turned his head away. After a moment George proposed tentatively:

"Sylvia's downstairs. She wants very much to see you."

Dalrymple shook his head.

"Catching."

"For her sake," George urged.

Dalrymple thought.

"All right," he said at last. "Long enough for me to tell her all right. But not near. Nurse in the room. Catching, and all that."

George clasped the hot hand.

"Thanks, Dolly. You've done a decent thing, and you're going to get well."

But as he left the room George felt that the physician had been right.

He spoke to the nurse, who sat in the upper hall, then he told Sylvia. She went up, and he waited for her. He felt he had to wait. He hoped Mrs. Dalrymple wouldn't appear again.

Sylvia wasn't long. She came down dry-eyed. She didn't speak even when George followed her to her

automobile, even when he climbed in beside her; nor did he try to break a silence that he felt was curative. In the light and surrounded by a crowd they could clasp hands; in this obscure solitude there was nothing they could do or say. Only on the steps of her home she spoke.

"Good-night, George, and thank you."

"Good-night, dear Sylvia," he said, and returned to the automobile, and told the man to drive him to his apartment.

XXIX

George didn't hear from Dalrymple again, nor did he expect to, but he was quite aware five days later of Goodhue's absence from the office and of his black clothing when he came in during the late afternoon. He didn't need Goodhue's few words.

"It's hard not to feel sorry, to believe, on the whole, it's rather better. Still, when any familiar object is unexpectedly snatched away from one——"

"We had a talk the other evening," George began.

Goodhue's face lighted.

"I'm glad, George."

He sighed.

"I've got to try to catch up. Mundy says rails have taken a queer turn."

"When you think for a minute not so queer," George commenced to explain.

A few days later Lambert told him that Sylvia had

gone to Florida.

"They'll probably stay until late in the spring. It agrees with Father."

"How did Sylvia seem?" George asked, anxiously.

"Wait awhile," Lambert advised, "but I don't think there are going to be any spectres."

He smiled engagingly.

"If there shouldn't be," he went on, "a few matters will have to be arranged, because Sylvia and I share alike. Josiah and I had a long, careful talk with Father last night about what we'd do with Sylvia's husband if she married. He left it to my judgment, advising that we might take him in if he were worth his salt. Josiah wanted to know with his bull voice what Father would think if it should turn out to be you. Very seriously, George, Father was pleased. He pointed out that you were a man who made things go, but that you would end by running us all, and he added that if we wanted that we would be lucky to get you as long as it made Sylvia happy. You know we want you, George."

George felt as he had that day on the Vesle when Wandel had praised him. No longer could Lambert charge him with having fulfilled his boasts, in a way; yet he hadn't consciously wanted this, nor was he quite sure that he did now.

"At least," George said, "you know what my policy would be to make Planter and Company something more than a money making machine."

Lambert imitated Blodgett's voice and manner.

"George, if you wanted to grow hair on a bald man's

head I'd say go to it."

"And there must be room for Dicky," George went on.

"We've played together too long to break apart now; but why talk about it? It depends on Sylvia."

That was entirely true. For the present there was nothing whatever to be done. Constantly George conquered the impulse to write to Sylvia, but she didn't write or give any sign, unless Lambert's frequent quotations from her letters could be accepted as thoughtful messages.

He visited the Baillys frequently now, for it was stimulating to talk with Squibs, and he liked to sit quietly with Mrs. Bailly. She had an unstudied habit, nevertheless, of turning his thoughts to his mother. Sylvia had seen her. She knew all about her. After all, his mother had given him the life with which he had accomplished something. He couldn't bear that their continued separation should prove him inconsistent; so early in the spring he went west.

His mother was more than ever ill at ease before his success; more than ever appreciative of the comforts he had given her; even more than at Oakmont appalled at the prospect of change. She wouldn't go east. She couldn't very well, she explained; and, looking at her tired figure in the great chair before the fire which she seldom left, he had an impulse to shower upon her extravagant and fantastic gifts, because before long it would be too late to give her anything at all. The picture made him realize how quickly the generations pass away, drifting one into the other with the rapidity of our brief and colourful seasons. He nodded, satisfied, reflecting that the cure for everything lies in the future, although one must

seek it in the diseased present.

He left her, promising to come back, but he carried away a sensation that he had intruded on a secluded content that couldn't possibly survive the presence of the one who had created it.

Lambert had no news for him on his return. It was late spring, in fact, before he told George the family had come north, pausing at a number of resorts on the way up.

"When am I to see Sylvia, Lambert?"

"How should I know?"

It was apparent that he really didn't, and George waited, with a growing doubt and fear, but on the following Friday he received a note from Betty, dated from Princeton. All it said was:

"Spring's at its best here. You'd better come to-morrow—Friday."

He hurried over to the marble temple.

"You didn't tell me Betty was in Princeton," he accused Lambert.

"Must I account to you for the movements of my wife?"

"Then Sylvia——" George began.

Lambert smiled.

"Maybe you'd better run down to Princeton with me this afternoon."

George glanced at his watch.

"First train's at four o'clock. Let Wall Street crash. I shan't wait another minute."

XXX

Betty had been right. Spring was fairly vibrant in Princeton, and for George, through its warm and languid power, it rolled back the years; choked him with a sensation of youth he had scarcely experienced since he had walked defiantly out of the gate of Sylvia's home to commence his journey.

Sylvia wasn't at the station. Neither was Betty. Abruptly uneasy, he drove with Lambert swiftly to the Alstons through riotous, youthful foliage out of which white towers rose with that reassuring illusion of a serene and unchangeable gesture. Undergraduates, surrendered to the new economic eccentricity of overalls, loafed past them, calling to each other contented and lazy greetings; but George glanced at them indifferently; he only wanted to hurry to his journey's end.

At the Tudor house Betty ran out to meet them, and Lambert grinned at George and kissed her, but evidently it was George that Betty thought of now, for she pointed, as if she had heard the question that repeated itself in his mind, to the house; and he entered, and breathlessly crossed the hall to the library, and saw Sylvia—the old Sylvia, it occurred to him—colourful, imperious, and without patience.

She stood in the centre of the room in an eager, arrested attitude, having, perhaps, restrained herself from impetuously following Betty. George paused, staring at her, suddenly hesitant before the culmination of his great desire.

"It's been so long," she whispered. "George, I'm not afraid to have you touch me——You mean I must come to you——"

He shook off his lassitude, but the wonder grew.

As in a dream he went to her, and her curved lips moved beneath his, but he pressed them closer so that she couldn't speak; for he felt encircling them in a breathless embrace, as his arms held her, something thrilling and rudimentary that neither of them had experienced before; something quite beyond the comprehension of Sylvia Planter and George Morton, that belonged wholly to the perplexing and abundant future.

THE END

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