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**The  
APPLE  
of  
THE EYE**



The  
APPLE  
of  
THE EYE

by  
GLENWAY WESCOTT

*Keep my commandments, and  
live; and my law as the  
apple of thine eye.  
Proverbs, 7-2*

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THE APPLE OF THE EYE

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**To**  
**R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM**



*“I saw nothing of the corruption  
of nature, the sin of my life, as an  
offence against God, as a thing  
odious to the holiness of his being,  
as abusing his mercy, and despising  
his goodness.”*

THE FORTUNATE MISTRESS

*Daniel Defoe*



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BOOK ONE  
BAD HAN

“Now as they were going along and talking they espied a boy feeding his father’s sheep. The boy was in very mean clothes, but of a very fresh and well-favoured countenance; and as he sat by himself, he sang. Hark, said Mr. Greatheart, to what the shepherd’s boy saith. . . . So they hearkened, and he said—

*He that is down needs fear no fall;  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble, ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.”*

THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

*John Bunyan*



## 1. THE VIOLENT NIGHT

**T**HE sun settled into the tawny marshes. Lean cattle with large bony heads came down the lane to struggle around the water-trough. Summer was falling from the thin trees.

Hannah Madoc stirred the fire. For two hours she had waited for her father to return from an election at Beeler. Supper was ready to set on the table. She sat by the window, hungry and resentful, preoccupied with the marshes, a broken, dominating brightness. The snarled grass mile after mile piled by the wind, the thick sunlight in cups of white water, the herds of waterfowl in insubstantial letters on the sky.

Beyond the yard the clay covered with burdocks and knot-grass fell away abruptly into bogs which disappeared in their turn in swales of harsh vegetation. A river crawled in loops and spirals through the valley, the bed of an ancient lake, twisting in tamarack swamps to the black, diminished water. From Hannah's window all this appeared as a spotted expanse, fecund but useless, a lure for the listless eye, bounded by stringy elms, by striped tamaracks—a tangled mass of vivid twigs, curious

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leaves, flowers, and berries, their outlines lost in profusion.

She drank a cup of black coffee, filled the tea-kettle, and sat down again. The sun crept among some trees. One by one with throaty cries the crows flew into the woods, their square notched wings like ragged sails.

She stood sullenly in the open door, peering into the yellow twilight, a tall girl, her shoulders heavy and her hips wide. The tea-kettle whined on the stove, and the night clamour of crows rose in the woods. The marsh itself was silent, but for a twitter of little nests on the edge of the sulphur sky.

Hannah shivered, and thought how the frost would blacken the tomato-vines in the night. Her coarse, stained hands lay loose in her lap.

She was not twenty; her mother had been dead for ten years, and her father's house kept by a maiden aunt until she was thirteen. She had seen the courtship of a widower, fat and nervous, and was not surprised when her father, biting his lips and flicking his eyes as if he expected a tantrum, informed her that her aunt was going to be married and she would have to stay at home from school.

The widower grew bald, and while he went courting, wet his infrequent hairs and combed them forward in stripes on his shiny head. He disciplined his moustache with wax.

His lady laid the iron like a pair of scissors

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across the lamp chimney, and curled her colourless hair. She pinned a white ruffle inside her dress to dissemble the flatness of her breasts, fastened a fall of lace at her throat, and descended the stairs with simpering dignity.

Hannah remembered how she had crept out on the steps after her father was in bed to peer through the rails at the lovers. The widower smiled anxiously, and patted her hand as he talked of himself and his grown son. His beloved always nodded too emphatically, and mixed the words of her answers. All one evening he held his plump arm around her meagre waist, and turned down the lamp to kiss her, while Hannah trembled above in the dark.

The fluttering old maid came up to the room they shared. Between eyelids which seemed to be closed, Hannah watched her, in a flannel night-gown buttoned tight under her chin, throw herself on her knees in an ecstasy of prayer, crying softly.

Hannah had seen at first no reason to dread her new responsibilities, and although she discovered reasons enough, she knew no one to whom she might have complained. This evening she thought of her delinquent father, vain, abusive, and drunken. Things might have been worse than they were: he had never struck her.

She heard a rattle of wheels, loose bolts, and springs, the dragging of feet in the deep dust of

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the road before the house. David, the white horse, pulled the buggy into the yard beside the barn. Its stringy, yellow legs glimmered as one moved over the other. It stopped. Her father tumbled slowly out of the buggy, and stood for a long time gripping the wheel with both hands. His voice rose faint and shrill, cursing.

The old man circled around David, peering minutely for something, and stooped and picked up a club about four feet long. Shouting, he struck the horse across the back; it jumped away and tipped the wagon upon two wheels. The old man's voice rose to a point. The neck, sagging between the tufted withers and gaunt head, turned apprehensively toward its master; and it shifted its weight on the huge feet with fringed fetlocks.

The old man's voice floated faintly through the open door. He raised the club a second time over the horse.

The girl turned wearily away; she had seen it all before. She lit a lamp, and set the boiled potatoes and salt pork once more over the weak blaze.

She heard his feet stumble on the back porch and he stood in the door blinking at the light: a little man with a grizzled moustache, its many points brown with tobacco-juice, over a sharp jaw. His vague and bloodshot eyes seemed undivided by the bridge of the nose, side by side in the middle of his pale head. The nose arose under its tip and spread

## THE VIOLENT NIGHT

out wide and flat. With a dignified gesture, he rubbed over his forehead a dirty hand with black fingernails.

"Your supper will be cold," she said indifferently.

"Cold, will it?" The voice was tired. He scrutinized his daughter with care, and pronounced, "You are a mean little hussy." He took a step into the room, staggered a little, and bent his weight against the back of a chair. "I know . . . I know . . . You always were a mean little hussy. You ought to have watered the cows." Each word was more gentle and murmuring; his head nodded sleepily.

She said, "I had enough to get the supper. You can come home and do it yourself, instead of hanging around Beeler getting stewed."

He held up his head doggedly; his eyes were bright; saliva dripped from his hidden and dirty mouth. He straightened, and elevated a proud trembling fist. "You are a mean little hussy," he shouted. "I'll whip you. Talk to your old father so. I'll whip you, that's what. I'll throw you out of my house, you miserable whelp."

Tears came into his watery eyes. The clenched fists shook and loosened. In the silence the tea-kettle whimpered on the stove; and her father wept. "I'll whip her," he said.

Hannah stood up. Suddenly he picked up the broom, and lunged at her. The blow fell among

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the dishes on the table. The lamp pitched to the floor, glass crashing in the kerosene.

She did not move. The trembling twilight entered the room; and some firelight fell on the floor. He stood still, his head hanging, crying to himself. The broomstick knocked softly on the edge of the table. She could not close her mouth, and watched the little old man in the bluish, uncertain dusk. The wind curled through the door.

"You devil," he muttered, and swung the stick in the air. She crouched, throwing her arms over her face, and screamed. The stick shook over her head.

With a leap she caught it in her hands, wrenched it from him, and dropped it. She wheeled around the table, crumpled his limp arms against his chest, and pushed him backwards through the door. He fell off the porch with a dull thud on the hard ground. She slammed the door.

Framed by the window, a few cold, colourless stars pushed into the sky beside the moon. Hannah trembled as they came, weak, harsh, and separate, into sight.

Then she brought from the sitting-room another lamp with a globular shade hand-painted with blood-red roses. She swept the broken lamp and dishes into a dustpan, and wiped up the kerosene; ate a little bread and butter, cleared the table, and washed the dishes.

## THE VIOLENT NIGHT

A sick stupidity overcame her, in which her mind escaped from an unjust and brutal responsibility. The red and yellow light, the grotesque shadows, the pan of weakly bright water in which her red hands agitated, the stained cucumber-green walls shook insubstantially before her eyes as she worked.

At last the crows were subdued, but a cow belated. Hannah peered through the square panes of glass, and saw the winter settling upon the swamps, the dead of winter—mounds of ice, blue snow clotting the roads, they two shut in for the long cruel yellow nights.

Where was her father? She heard a feeble groan, but insisted to herself that she didn't care; he was drunk and mean. She held her throat in her hand.

As she stepped out on the porch, he groaned again. The moonlight palpitated on the ground, and before her lay the shadow of the house, a deep square pit into which she peered. His face was a pale spot on the black lawn; he lay on his back beneath her.

"Are you there?" she said.

"Girlie." His voice was very faint. "Girlie. Why don't you help your father? I am hurt." He moaned, and tried to lift his head.

"You don't deserve to be helped," she said harshly. But she brought out the lamp, and set it on a chair where it blazed uncertainly. She jumped down beside him and bent over his face.

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The eyelids were shut. A little blood soaked through the thin hair over the right temple. The grass was stiff with frost under the soles of her house-slippers.

Hannah stooped, and lifted the little body in her arms. The eyes unclosed wearily. She carried him carefully up the steps, and laid him on the square bed in the sitting-room, and put the lamp on a table by his head. He seemed to be unconscious. She washed the shallow cut, and pinned a towel over it; undressed him, and covered him with quilts, and built a fire in the sitting-room stove.

The pillow rose round and strong on both sides of the grey face with scooped-out cheeks. The eyes seemed to protrude in their widening sockets. The breath entered and returned slowly from his nostrils. The arteries in his unshaven neck fluttered weakly.

Hannah folded a shawl over her head, and ran out of the house down the road.

She returned. Sometimes her father stirred, and pulled at the red and white checked bedspread with his fingers bent over from the swollen knuckles. Sometimes his waxy eyelids divided; and the lustreless eyeballs roved over the ceiling. The girl's eyes followed his across the papered surface, the hoops of faded flowers in a mocking and aloof expanse. The beady eyes and bone-like lips of relatives in crayon enlargements fixed on her from the walls; the worn, cheap chairs surrounded her in a

## THE VIOLENT NIGHT

circle. Her vision wandered, but returned inevitably to the old man in the bed. In the weight like stone of his bony head on the pillows was the contingency of death she faced, her poor scraps of property around her.

The fire sounded like a heavy flock of birds. She put more wood on it, and when a buggy rattled into the yard, opened the kitchen door.

"He's in here, doctor." The doctor was a reddish young man with protuberant lips and a moustache.

"What happened to him?"

"He came home from election drunk and fell off the back porch."

"I see. . . . A heavy drinker?"

"Yes."

He lifted and turned the sick man like a child in his capable fat hands. He fingered the bruises, and held a pink ear to the back and chest. "There are only a couple of ribs fractured," he said, "but I'm afraid he's pretty bad off. Congestion in both lungs."

Hannah followed him to the door. "You never can tell about these old people. But I don't think he'll pull through and he may go like a flash. You'd better not stay alone."

The Robins boy said his mother would come. In half an hour she appeared, a peaked colourless woman. "It's got blacker than a cat," she cried in a petulant soprano. "You poor girl! What ever'll

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you do without your pa?" They sat by the stove. Sometimes one or the other slept.

Hannah remembered the stock, and hurried out with a lantern to feed them. The bitter scent of the barns, the profound mottled eyes and brutal lips, the pure plush voices, warmed and comforted her.

She found Mrs. Robins standing by the bed. The cheeks sank from the nose, which seemed polished in the lamplight. But he still breathed.

A centreless, viscous light pushed through the windows.

Hannah went outdoors. The green stars were flickering. Black and bearded shadows moved under the heavy trees. The shocked corn stood in the field like a village of barbaric silver tents.

In the west she turned her face toward the marshes of frost and water, toward the sharp-husked seed and stony leaf. The wind came pointed over the horizon, folding the harsh grasses into one direction. Squawking, the bitterns waded into the air, their interlaced quills golden as rust and granite-blue.

As she turned toward the house, Mrs. Robins stood in the door, the words on her lips.

## 2. IN THE FLOWER (PISTIL AND STAMEN)

**H**ANNAH rented her farm in November, and went to work in Boyle's store and saloon. One mid-winter Sunday she returned to Beeler along the Sheboygan road. The hill beneath which the village lay, was topped by a cemetery, an acre of blue and white stones cut with the names of the principal families.

The hub of five roads which led to it like spokes, Beeler was more important than its population of one hundred and twenty suggested, more animated than the numb visage of January afternoon could indicate. In the dry light, the cluster of trees, buildings, and steeples looked both mean and mysterious.

Under the black boughs of an orchard, bee-hives were arranged upon small, depopulated streets. The black mill-race, between miniature levees and willows, cut across the village under footbridges of timbers dropped from bank to bank. About eight feet wide, it issued beneath the thin ice of the pond through a wooden sluice covered with frozen moss into a meadow where a horse stood, its tail to the

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

wind. On the edges, a pane of ice was sustained by some dead weeds; in the centre, the current ran black and unchecked.

The houses on both sides of the road, brick and clapboard, were surrounded by picket fences and evergreens. A little sad deer of iron with slant iron eyes stood among frugal dead grasses. Near him a woman in billowy skirts of grey calico floated over the ragged snow.

At the crossing of the Sheboygan road and the Grimes road were clustered the hall, the school, the church—pivots of life: flimsy structures with empty windows in hideous symmetry. The church was of brick, rectangular, topped by an obtuse shingled gable. The steeple was substantial at the bottom like a box, and near the top became spinous to elevate in the sky its tin Protestant cock. Behind ranged the sheds, partitions, and mangers marred by cribbing horses.

The road continued northeast through the village, past a blacksmith shop and another saloon with houses of old men set evenly beside it. Hannah walked eastward upon the brick walk which pertained to Boyle's. She met Mrs. Baltus leaving her shuttered house, a seamstress whose husband was serving time for bigamy in which their marriage had involved him. Her mouth, a matter of large crooked teeth and thin lips, set up a standard of melancholy to which her bright eyes did not adhere.

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The girl paused on the wooden porch of her new home. In the east the mill brooded, an abrupt unpainted monolith. The roof slanted all one way, from front to back. A narrow platform, four feet from the ground with steps at each end, extended across the front to unload wheat and rye from high-wheeled lumber wagons and to return middlings, shorts, or bran. One of the small uneven windows, opaque with dust, was full of "patent" flour in cloth bags marked in red and blue with the miller's name, the name Snow Queen, and a picture of a florid woman crowned with golden grain in a night containing one star like a gooseberry.

The sprawling saloon faced it vaguely across a littered yard. The unroofed piazza was fenced with rows of hitching posts. One door admitted to the store, another to the bar. At the right the orchard was also populated with a beggary of sheds, broken chicken coops, and the pump. The apple twigs, thickened to knuckles where the fruit had hung, keeping still here and there a rotten brown residue, broke the January light into mysterious lumps on the bare ground, on the rags of grey snow. Guinea hens peered for refuse and curved their cold faces over their spotted, egg-shaped bodies, crooning to themselves.

Hannah was depressed by the winter Sabbath, and went up to her room, passing through the store where Mrs. Boyle sewed on a shirt for her eldest

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son, and three children fought on the floor. Her room contained a bed with a torn red comforter, a chair with a broken back, a wash-stand without bowl or pitcher, and an imitation-oak tin trunk. Above her pillow the plaster was cracked in a black cross; and the uncurtained window gaped upon the road.

She had seen her tenants, an old German woman named Schuler with her son and daughter-in-law, established in her home. The beds, chairs, tables, dishes, and clocks, the ploughs and wagons, David, the two cows and three steers, the hens and lean spotted sows—an auction had scattered them over the whole county. The old woman with a shiny cane had ordered her chair beside Hannah's window, and slept where her father had died. Grey geese hissed by the water-trough. The foreign odour of hand-cheese curing made the kitchen seem hot and unventilated; and a jar of sauerkraut frothed behind the stove.

But Hannah did not care, nor did she think of her father. Never since the violent night had she gone through the elements of the scene to take blame upon herself or to shift it to his dead shoulders. She realized what no one else knew, but went past the memory on tiptoe; as she had walked down a lane in childhood past a certain gate behind which the air was poisoned and the grass defiled by the

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carcass of a horse or sheep, and hurried swiftly on, unstricken, irresponsible.

She swayed in the twilight, and heard Wally Filber's hound howl on its chain. At last she stirred because of hunger, and went down-stairs quickly, toward the clattering of dishes.

The family collected for supper, Boyle with them, since the bar-room was empty. The bull-like lift of the throat from his collar seemed subdued. Gloom pendulous in mouth and cheeks, he ate as if at a manger, ignoring the uproar of his offspring, the peevish remonstrances of their mother.

The eldest was a girl of fourteen called Cassie, pale-eyed and evasive. There were two boys black as their father, and two girls, and the baby, another black boy. Hannah supervised his bread and milk in the wooden trough of his high-chair, wiped his mouth, and picked up his spoon. Mrs. Boyle watched with kindly suspicion. She seemed constantly to stiffen some part of herself for the shock of a force which struck her always in another place, and extended toward Boyle a scrutiny insistent but furtive.

Hannah's head felt better, but she yawned through supper; and when the dishes were washed, and Mrs. Boyle asked how she felt, she answered, "Pretty bad," drank a whiskey-sling, and went up-stairs.

She set her lamp on the wash-stand beside the

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very dark blue window, and undressed. The confined air was yellow, the plaster like porcelain.

The girl took down the cracked mirror from the wall, and examined her body. For the first time she knew it as a thing of value. Her black hair swayed like brushwood on her shoulders. She shifted the mirror from side to side. In the light her skin remained tawny; and shadows upon it were as soft as shadows in fur. Putting the mirror down, she rose on the balls of her feet, threw out her arms, and stretched herself.

A door slammed beneath. Suddenly out of the dark came a cat-call and a cluster of male giggles, words shouted and guffaws from the middle of the road. Hannah knew what they meant, and folded a skirt about her. Holding it with one hand across her breast, she took the lamp in the other and strode to the window. She held the lamp over her head, smiled coarsely, her lips drawn back from her teeth. Then she blew out the light and went to bed.

She lay there heavy and tormented. The saloon was full. A clink of glasses and bottles wavered upward. A man snapped cards on the table, another pounded with his fist. Henry Kinney began to sing "Oh my darling Nellie Gray," and stopped. The result of Mrs. Balthus' lamp was a pumpkin of light. She saw herself standing naked and sombre on a monolith like the mill. The glassy tinkle shim-

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mered, laughter, "darling Nellie Gray" again. The hound howled, far off.

Her work was hard. At a quarter past six Mrs. Boyle knocked. She jumped out of bed, and slipped a cotton morning-dress over her head, and knotted up her hair. Her breath was white in front of her, and dimmed the mirror. She washed her face and hands at the kitchen sink, and helped Mrs. Boyle get breakfast, pancakes, bacon, and fried potatoes. Boyle descended black and sulky. They ate in silence; and Mrs. Boyle stirred up the children. By this time farmers who came to the cheese-factory would arrive for a stein of beer or groceries. Either Han or Mrs. Boyle went into the store; the other would get the children off to school. After dinner she swept or scrubbed the two public rooms. Sometimes the proprietor would go out for an afternoon, or leave early in the morning with a team to bring supplies from the station, when Han would attend the bar. So the winter passed.

One afternoon in April she was scrubbing the saloon, her kitchen apron looped to her waist over a soiled black petticoat. Alone, sitting on her heels in the middle of the soapy floor, she heard some women talking in the other room.

"It's harder to make a hen set early in the spring . . ." She listened, and thought of the

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worms curling and uncurling, and wiped up the floor.

The door opened behind her. A young man stood with his legs wide apart, looking down. She smiled her crooked smile, wiped her hands on her skirt, and stood up awkwardly.

"Gi' me a glass of beer. It's warm to-day."

"Yes sir, it is." She stooped to the great keg with a mug. His black hair curled like vines over his ears.

"Maybe it's not so hot. I've got on . . ." He stopped in confusion and drank.

She observed the thickness of flesh over his eyebrows. "Yes, flannels . . . I know. They make you sweat like a trooper."

He looked gratefully at her. "But I tell you the horses were steaming. My mare was dripping and all foamy between her legs."

"Did you come to mill?"

"Yeah, I brought in the last of our wheat and some rye and oats for the hogs. Give me another. Do you work here now?" He pronounced his th's like d's, and puffed his words out larger than other men.

"Ever since my father died, last November."

"Oh, old Mr. Madoc . . . Do you like it?"

"Yes, it's all right. But now it's spring, I'd like to be out-doors more. Last year I ploughed, five acres down by the sheep-fold. Dad said my

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furrows were as crooked as a yearling's tail, but I had fun. And the corn grew. I had fun with the crows."

"They play hob with the seed, the devils," he said.

"Oh, well, you don't care much about seed when you're ploughing."

"That's right, you don't. Well I must get on home. So long."

"So long."

Mrs. Boyle smiled craftily. "You and Jule Bier had quite a talk."

Hannah had never heard his name, but answered, "Yes, he's a good friend of mine." The hazard successful, she added, "Where is their farm?"

"Why his father lives right here, on the other side of the mill-pond. But of course Jule's working for Harley Diggs, four miles or more out on the marsh road."

Hannah took long, deliberate stitches.

"Of course he's a German. But he's a good steady fellow. Germans though, they're always kind of heartless. They were as poor as church mice when they first came. The woman was in a family way, always wore a shawl over her head like a gipsy. Straight from the old country they were, Jule must have been about five then. The baby was born dead and the mother died. Oh, they were poor! People gave them things or they'd

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have starved. That first winter, I've heard they lived on cabbages and cow-beets."

Hannah raised her eyebrows. "Oh, but they're not like that now?"

"My stars, no! Old Mr. Bier has even paid off the mortgage. How, I don't know. They set out to do things in that heartless way."

When Boyle did not return, supper was gay and talkative. The women and children laughed together. From time to time Mrs. Boyle looked anxiously at the clock.

An old man came in with a tin pail for beer. When Hannah sent him wavering off in the dark, two others entered; and she remained on duty. She had changed her dress, and tied a black velvet ribbon around her forehead.

She preferred this to waiting in the store where the women were short with her. They thought her a brazen flirt. Under heavy black hats tilted forward their eyes, in triangles of wrinkles, reproached her. One would step to the door between the two rooms, and see the crooked-browed girl laughing with her husband or callow bony sons, and walk sourly back to her friends. She would say, "Is your new girl pretty good help now, Mrs. Boyle?" The others would raise their ugly millinery and weatherbeaten faces, sharing her hate, but careful to say nothing to offend the storekeeper's wife.

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The air was striped with smoke. At the card tables men looked down their pipes, or bent their tongues about wads of tobacco. Cards were snapped. One swore or spit in the direction of the brass spittoon.

Men stood along the bar on one foot, the other foot on the rail. Conversation rose in peaks of noise and subsided. From time to time a resolute wife appeared in the doorway, pronounced her man's name sternly, and he went, to be replaced by another. Behind the bar tier upon tier with hieratical precision rose the drinks: bottle upon bottle, brandy upon Duffy's, kümmel and anisette, Virginia Dare, and red and white wine; doubled by the cracked mirror, glittering in the smoke; upward to the two elks' heads and the stuffed fox, a second fur of dust and cobwebs upon them, the regard of their glass eyes voluptuous and cruel.

The spilled wine scintillated in puddles on the bar, on the soaked and veined surface. Hannah swept her towel through them and mopped up the yellow beer foam. She saw a man falter in the middle of a sentence to stare at her body. She leaned against the mantel, flanked by oranges and withered lemons in baskets of German silver, and pretended to fix her eyes on something far and indefinite, but watched the crowd covertly.

A young man had stood at the bar all evening. He had treated everybody twice, taken several

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whiskeys, and began to be drunk. About a quarter to nine he told a long story, lowering his voice to a mumble. The others stopped talking, slid closer, seemed to listen with their lips parted by a suspended chuckle. The narrator's thick-lidded eyes crept automatically over Hannah.

The story ended in laughter, the awkward laughter which veils a less companionable emotion; and the teller called for a glass of schnapps. Hannah said, "It's time for you to go home, Joe Belger. This is the last you're going to get."

"It is, is it?" He rolled his eyes, his lip hanging loose. "I'd like to know who's goin' to make me go. I wan' you to know, I'm no' drunk. I'm no' drunk. I can take all your damned swill yet."

Hannah faced him sullenly.

"When I do, I guess I'll take you with me. And when I'm done with you, you'll not be so sassy."

"You drunken fool," she said.

"You're pretty." He lifted a dirty hand from his pocket and pulled it out. She saw it, an oval with black nails, but did not move. He patted her, smiling.

She jerked away and swung around the end of the bar. The men drew back. She seized the drunkard by his coat-lapels, and drove him backwards. Before he knew what had happened, he rolled on the platform outside. The dark was bor-

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dered by horses who regarded him mildly, nodding their noses. She slammed the door.

Hannah stalked back to her place. The other doorway had filled with startled women. The men muttered, "Good job, Han. Serves him right."

She turned on them. "Joe Belger's a fool, but he's better than any of you. You listen to his dirty stories and drink with him till he's stewed. You think it and he says it. Every last one of you would like to, but you haven't the nerve. You haven't the nerve and—" tossing her head at the doorway, "you're afraid of your wives."

Her beauty threatened them in a chaos of bottles and mirrors. Fatigue drew everyone out into the night. The vertigo over, she slept, and resumed her monotonous life.

During the spring Jule Bier came often. He timed his trips to mill or the blacksmith to find her alone.

Between noon and twilight clouds rolled in a warm wind like barrels, and piled over the horizon in various directions. The air was pierced by grape vines and cinnamon roses. In the dust Amelia Krohn, her peaked face enveloped in a blue sunbonnet, followed her cow and its alto bell. Ants crawled between the bricks of the walk. Above them Mrs. Blau's dog trotted beside Mrs. Bolton's

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dog, their tails precise. The narrow nighthawks promenaded heaven.

Hannah appeared in the back yard. She wore a cotton dust-cap, her hair collected in white curl-papers on her low forehead. She hung a wooden pail on the pump and stared at the evening. On the tongue of a wagon a hen grouped her chickens; their red skin turned in the patches of feathers. A cherry tree scattered its sick, round, yellow leaves.

Her beau was coming in two hours. The quiet persisted and darkened. Hawks returned to their chimneys. The heavy moon stepped from hill to hill. Night had come, night warmer than thought. Hannah filled her pail with water.

When Jule came, she appeared white and ruffled, Sweetheart perfume on her breast, her hair divided in damp branches, her face pallid with powder. "Wait a minute. I will get my coat." He leaned against the candy counter, until she returned.

He spread a flowered laprobe over their knees. The moon continued among pallors. The darkening air seemed crowded with pendant calices and stamens, which set in motion slow sweet draughts. In the feathery tree-tufts some little birds sang, vesper sparrows and phoebes.

In the centre the mill-pond was cold as a mirror, but upon the margin, lemon and frail, the rushes threw down their shadows. Marsh-trees closed

## IN THE FLOWER

over the road. From their roots the marsh fragrance aspired, harsh and narcotic; Hannah knew it well.

Jule tapped the leather dash-board with the whip in his hands, pointing to a house on a hill, over above a pool surrounded with cat-tails. "That is my home." It was only a black peak in the sky. From one of the barns a faint colour without radiance penetrated a dusty glass. "Father is milking. I wish he wouldn't work so late, but he always has and always will, till he drops in his tracks."

The mare trotted downward past an old orchard and raspberry patch. Some turkeys roosted in a dying tree against the light. Unfolding her white veil, she bared her black head, the costly glimmer of her face. "Have you always lived here?" she asked.

"Oh, not always. But since I was five years old. We came, you know, from Saxony."

"Can you remember that?"

"Yes. We lived by a great forest. The pine-trees came right down to our house. Nothing could grow under them, it was so dark. There were foxes and rabbits there and wolves. I got lost there once. I was out all night. I thought I should never get back."

His knee pressed against her; it seemed to make a mark. She said, "But they found you."

"Yes, but I don't remember that."

The road cut into a hill as it ascended, so that

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the bank was above their heads. The moon crept away. In eccentric triangles a bat flapped over them, his track a channel of colourless sky leved by trees.

They spoke no more. Jule stopped the mare by the road which pushed into the woods. Some oval pendulous leaves reached their knees, like black flowers on the laprobe.

He sighed, and putting his arm behind her, drew her to him. He began to kiss her face, but she pushed him away with both hands and turned toward the forest. He relaxed his embrace. Suddenly she thrust her hand under his coat and took him. They kissed.

The stars swam to and fro like fish in a waveless sea. The black mare shifted from leg to leg. On the white laprobe the hazel-leaves vacillated.

At last she shivered in her lover's arms, and said, "We must go back." She heard his sigh in the darkness, and felt his lips in farewell upon her throat and lips. He took up the reins.

One night in August they went together to a dance at Silver Creek. The Sabbath had been a hot recess in the frenzied harvest. Men moved hammocks and chairs under the pale dried trees, and sat in their shirt-sleeves, wiping their faces, speechless. At intervals the locust pricked the air with his minute scream. The world twisted about,

## IN THE FLOWER

and the boiling fields turned into the shadow of night.

The little mare tipped her ears forward and backward. The hills were little horns of warmth pointed into the amber sky. As it faded the quaggy hollows filled with musk and fog, which eddied in circles past her pink, distended nostrils.

"It only took us forty minutes to come," Jule said, holding out a thick silver watch. Hannah jumped over the wheel. "I'll wait in the cloak-room."

He tied the mare in the shed and blanketed her. Men stood in the dusk whistling softly, or talking of harvest, horses, or women. Jule walked toward the hall. A deep trembling arose within him like laughter.

Loafers clustered on the steps about the lighted door: young boys and older men, one whose head was like a white pumpkin, one with a harelip, too repulsive to find favor, who collected only to peer at the girls.

By the door Hannah breathed from a late rose pinned on her coarsely embroidered dress. The shuffle of feet, the sound of violins like a fall of arrows, laughter and talk played in the room. Already the air was bitter with perspiration, cheap perfume, and the smoke of many oil-lamps. She collected the tumult in a flower whose flesh was dark and mysteriously transparent. She drew

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back her drooping lips from her irregular teeth, sniffing the rank air.

They danced. There were square-dances, circle two-steps, an occasional quadrille with a tall man in shirt-sleeves calling the changes and tapping the floor with his foot, and the waltz, the new whirling dance. The girls blanched and sighed curiously and shivered. Overhead echoes of the cornet fell like spears.

The young people did not dance gracefully. Labour had moulded them too gaunt, too heavy, too strong. The heel predominated in the movements of their feet. They stooped. Their arms hung as if weighted. Their faces became vacant as if they were sleepy. They clung drowsily. Sometimes the men stared curiously into the face of one with purple lips which was full of a wistful animal melancholy.

The evening's entertainment did not progress, but went round and round. Excitement progressed of its own impetus.

In the intervals Jule and Hannah went down to the basement to drink beer and kummel. Or they walked arm in arm under the trees. Sweet and restless, the music circled between branch and branch. Behind a lilac, he kissed her where her breast withdrew under the coarse embroidered bodice.

At eleven the boys and old loafers withdrew.

## IN THE FLOWER

The older men, family groups in democrats and drop-seats, drove away. In a kind of professional frenzy, the orchestra scraped and pounded. They had commenced the evening with black ties and celluloid collars; now the cornetist blew in his under-shirt, his cheeks two blood-red balls. Between dances, ascetics for gain, they drank, smoked, swore, told dirty stories, their eyes on yellow-haired girls with their men, taking the paths beneath the ashes.

At twelve Jule and Hannah stood by the window. They heard the vain wind stroking the leaves. "Oh, the air is filthy in here," she said.

"Let's go. Get your coat and we'll take a walk." Arm in arm they faded into the night of which they were native. In all the dusky corners of bush or tree men and girls lurked, whispering, and above them the stars, soundless, as if lip upon lip.

The houses of Silver Creek were unlighted where the old and the lonely lay, tossing in heat. From a window a black breeze sucked out a shred of curtain. Jule and Hannah were glad to feel the dust dull and noiseless under their feet. Sound retreated from their tired ears, faint and fair. They passed the church, shuttered and snowy, and turned down a lane. He swung his arm about her waist.

There was a thorn-tree by the fence. Beyond

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

it the corn rattled in hard, subtle rows; and a frog murmured. He said, "The wheat field. We can lie upon the bundles." She followed him carefully through the barbed-wire fence. The stubble cracked under their feet. The shocks of grain stood gravely, under a firm sky sprinkled with stars. Jule tipped one shock over, and spread its bundles carefully under another. They lay down in the shadow, their faces and the field faintly luminous. Hannah pressed her lips into the bearded heads, ran them up and down the sleek straw. Her lover's hands pled for her; his patience was all around her, relentless and fresh. He murmured, "The air is smoky. There must be forest fires."

"Yes, it is bitter," she said. She trembled and faced the downpour of kisses on her mouth and throat.

He left her then a moment, and walked back and forth in the field. There the wind rubbed against him with a pair of hot, slender horns.

"Come back, Jule," she called. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing, dear. It is so warm. . . ."

He returned. She laughed in his arms. It was as if he held his own self.

The dew dripped upon them; and he felt it with his finger wetting her cheek.

### 3. UPWARD, UPWARD

**H**ANNAH and Mrs. Boyle sat sewing in the store. They had sent the children out upon the roads with bags and baskets to gather hazelnuts. The day was cool and shiny. On the ground shadows followed the disorderly clouds: the women looked up as the light faded between the shelves of spices and dress goods, under suspended rakes and tin pails.

"Mrs. Boyle, don't think I'm fresh for what I'm going to tell you."

"Why, Hannah, what is it? It doesn't matter what you say. What is it?" She leaned over a dress for the baby which had begun to change her figure.

"Mr. Boyle, does he . . . has he ever run after other women?"

She replied as if he might be hiding to hear her testimony. "You mean that he . . . Has he said something to you? Tell me what he did."

The girl continued to sew.

"Tell me, Hannah. My feelings won't be hurt."

"Oh, it doesn't really matter. He meant well enough, and didn't do any harm. What I want to

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know is, do you care? I mean, if he went further."

Mrs. Boyle hesitated over her treason. "Oh, yes, he has his wild streaks. Once he had a spell for Mrs. Balthus. . . . I never said anything."

"But don't you hate him for it?" the girl asked.

"Oh, no. He can't help himself. It's all my fault, I guess."

"Why is it your fault, I'd like to know?"

"Well Han, I'm always tired out, and I ain't pretty like I used to be. I've had six children.

"But they were his children."

"A man hates a woman who's always having children . . . who's sure to." She nodded her foolish head like a toy. "He swore when I told him about this one, and when I cried he patted me, and said it was a dirty shame."

The two women sewed. A cockerel rose on his spindle legs to crow discordantly. Hannah put some potatoes on to boil and sat down again. A windy dusk tore the smoke out of the chimneys.

"You ought to tell me. I have a right to know."

Hannah returned a tantalizing justice. "Yes, I suppose you have. But I haven't much right to tell, since he didn't say I should. And I've no hard feeling against him."

"You must remember he is my husband." She crumpled her sewing in her small red hands.

Hannah answered crisply, tempted beyond her

## UPWARD, UPWARD

purpose. "He has said things several times that I've pretended not to understand. And touched me. I wouldn't have said anything, but last night——"

"Yes?"

"It was half dark in here; the big lamp doesn't work. I didn't see him until he was close; his eyes were very queer and bright, and his shirt all open at the neck. He took my hand and pushed it under his shirt, sort of laughing, and held it tight. I didn't know what to do, and he began to kiss me."

Mrs. Boyle backed up against the counter, stiff and pale. "Didn't you do anything? You could have got away. You could have struck him. Didn't you cry? He'd have let you go; he wouldn't hurt a fly. You wretched girl! Why didn't you call?" She shook her small face, the eyes full of tears.

The girl was haughty. "There wasn't time. And besides he wasn't hurting me." The woman pushed a dirty handkerchief into her eyes; Hannah put an arm around her. "Now listen, Mrs. Boyle. It'll be all right. He has his fancies, but he really doesn't care for any of us. What'd he do without you? He'd look fine with all these little kids. Don't cry. He knows it; if he doesn't I'll tell him."

"Oh, no, don't say anything, don't say anything." She was comforted, and clung to the girl.

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When Hannah saw Jule she said she wanted another place. "Why?" he asked with affectionate suspicion.

"Oh, I'm tired of pouring drinks and measuring calico for old women."

"And Boyle, does he run after you?"

She smiled. "Oh, yes. Not that I mind. But I'm sorry for his poor scared little wife."

"I'd like to beat him up," he said, running his hands along the counter.

"Don't be silly. . . . Don't you know anybody who wants help? I'd like to get back to the country."

"Yes, I think I do. Mrs. Balker over near where I work. I'll find out."

Early in November Mrs. Balker drew up before the store in a democrat. She drove her fat black horse herself, her hands protected by coon-skin mittens. She sat up very straight, a round hat secured by a dirty-looking veil tied under her chin.

The little tin trunk was carried down from the bare room. Hannah appeared on the platform among the hitching-posts, kissed the children and Mrs. Boyle, who cried a little, shook hands with Boyle, obscure and speculative, who wished her luck. She climbed up beside her new employer, and tucked in the buffalo robe.

Their road cut downward through a dreary forest.

## UPWARD, UPWARD

Tamaracks stood with their moth-eaten bark and untidy needles, each upon its little island of sod; ice of a startling whiteness, dead flower-stalks and red stems between; a flimsy boundary of barbed-wire to restrain steers and heifers in the summer; the road raised by sunken stones and timbers above the level of miniature canals full of sumach the colour of dried blood.

The old woman watched her furtively. The marshes were empty. Silver upon their jagged wings, crows alone went through the funereal trees. Hannah heard the clamour of many in some thick pines where they baited a dizzy owl, or fought over the rotten carcass of a hog.

The road veered upward again between farms, stubble-acres dotted with pyramids of manure capped with hoar-frost or fields striped with furrows. They passed a prosperous-looking farm with sprawling barns and an unpainted house. Hannah waved her hand to Jule, who led a gigantic black bull through the yard by a pole fastened to his nose.

The old woman broke her moody silence. "Who was that?"

"Jule Bier."

"Oh, yes, you know him." She wheezed frankly into a blue handkerchief. "I hain't asked you why you left Boyle's. It's no matter, I dare say Boyle devilled you."

Hannah chuckled. "Oh, he was all right."

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"Mind you," she continued, "I see no harm in your havin' a little fun. You might as well take it when you can get it, Lord knows." The solid rectangle of her face wrinkled into hard crescents. "But with those five children, or however many there may be by this time . . . my Lord! It would have made a mess." She wasted no curiosity on Hannah.

The next farm surrounded the end of a lane bordered by plums and evergreens, into which the fat horse turned of his own accord. Behind the house, the red barn, horse stable, chicken coops, and outhouses, the earth dropped strangely, so as to leave them on the horizon; and Hannah saw beneath another icy lake surrounded with weeds.

Mrs. Balker tumbled briskly over the wheel of the democrat and began to unhitch. Hannah knotted up the tugs and reins, and unbuckled the holdback, glancing curiously at her new home. Within the stable a dappled, white, equally fat horse whinnied. In the yard littered with potato peelings and bare bones, a few pullets flicked their circular, lidless eyes at the dismal sky. The old woman, with a peculiar halting gait, as if each step gave her a twinge in her substantial hips, led the way into the house. Hannah looked over her shoulder at the disk of ice, the tilting fields, and saw a puff of smoke shell from the chimney, half a mile away, where Jule lived.

## UPWARD, UPWARD

She shifted quickly into the new order. From May to September Mrs. Balker kept a hired man, but during the winter she and a girl did the chores. She kept three brood sows and a young boar, two horses, five cows, chickens, cats, and a blind dog named Caesar who lay on a burlap bag behind the kitchen stove. She preferred the outdoor work as her share, since it spoiled her appetite to fuss over the stove.

Formerly Mrs. Balker had been a zealous Methodist, a rigid moralist, a "power in the community," delicate in person, and a great reader. An epidemic of scarlet fever had removed, after a week of horror and delirium, her husband and two children. Habits, perceptions, and prejudices had gone with them. An embodied routine, a sturdy irony, a dead level of emotion impossible to be raised or furrowed, survived.

The winter encircled these two women, solid and comfortless. By the first of December, the water in the trough accumulated ice two inches thick. Mrs. Balker in high boots and leather mittens broke it with an axe, and let out the five thin cows from their stanchions. They jostled and bunted in the doorway, wild with thirst. When they saw the black water, pied with ice and steaming in the colder air, they snorted; clouds blew from their thick muzzles; and they drank short gulps. While the old woman wheeled out manure in a dripping wheel-

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barrow, they stood on one side of the stack, away from the wind, eating the shiny straw.

By lantern-light they carried the foaming milk in a can up the slippery path cut through the snow-banks, and set it to rise in large tin pans in the pantry. The door was barred against the fierce blue nights; and they went up stairs carrying hot flatirons wrapped in flannels to warm their beds.

In the morning Hannah skimmed the leathery cream from the pans, and put it away to sour. Every second day she made butter, putting the cream in a churn like a small barrel narrow at the top, in which she worked a round dasher with a wooden handle. She held the churn between her spread knees, and stared through the window at the shallow mauve snow, from which the dry weeds and grasses were strung upward for the wind to play upon. When the pale blue buttermilk began to gather around the dasher, she looked in shrewdly, at the proper moment threw in a dipper of cold water; and soon after drained out the butter, and worked, salted, and packed it in jars for the market.

For dinner she brought in a piece of beef from the meat-box, which stood in the drifted snow outside the door, and thawed it behind the stove. After washing up the dishes, she baked bread. About three o'clock, Mrs. Balker in her dirty short skirt and boots came in from the barn. "If it's the same to you, I'll take Nance and drive over to my sister's

## UPWARD, UPWARD

for the night. There's nothin' to do but milk and feed the critters." Her sister scolded her for not "keeping herself up better"; so she put a great copper kettle of water on the stove, and laid out her best clothes, reeking with moth-balls.

Hannah always took these occasions to meet her lover. At dusk she put on overshoes and heavy woolen leggins, and set out across the fields. The sun had left a chocolate-coloured haze among the rich dead leaves of the oak-trees in the west. She kept to the way she knew, down a lane and along fences beneath some elms. The snow was rough in a path where her own feet had gone before.

She came down a lane behind the barn. Two unbroken colts, with hair like fur and manes combed out by the wind, ran about the straw-stack.

Hannah knew that Jule would be alone in the barns, because his rheumatic employer did not venture into the severe cold. She knew he would say, as he brought in the milk, that he was going to spend the night at his father's. He would hitch the little mare to the cutter, and put her in Mrs. Balker's stable beside the whinnying black and white geldings. She remembered how the wind pounded on the windows, or how the snow heaped up on the doorstep, and how happy they were, sitting by the stove while the flatirons heated.

The colts ceased their curvetting, and came

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inquisitively to her, rolling their soft eyes, their pink nostrils palpitating. But when she put out a hand to touch them, they reared backward, and began to circle again about the yellow stack capped with snow. She entered the fragrant gloom of the stable. Shadowy cattle creaked in their wooden stanchions.

Jule's lantern hung over a box-stall on a nail festooned with cobwebs. On his knees he helped a new-born calf to suck the globular bag of its heifer mother. His face, when he lifted it, glowed with welcome and content.

He treasured her as a part of himself. He did not brood upon her and did not idealize her. As his flesh thickened and concentrated in a solidity of health, his imagination roved unsatisfied.

And he was driven by his father's passion, by the old man labouring in a frenzy of mortification. He could not forget that he had eaten cast-off turnips and cabbages, that his son's life had been preserved by charity. He hurried among his cattle and sheep, a slight round-backed figure, biting his moustache. He thought of a time when others would forget, as he could not, the bad days: the little boy and he, hand in hand, on roads rough with ice, begging for work from house to house; his pallid wife, the black shawl clutched under her chin, waiting for another baby.

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The succeeding years had not altered him. But they had enabled him by brutal labour, by shrewdness in raising sheep on stony hills good for little else, by European frugality, to buy, with a heavy mortgage at first, the small farm near Beeler, and gradually to rid himself of the debt. In this land of the free, nothing would purchase the respect and forgetfulness of his neighbours but accumulated money. To his scrupulous peasant eyes, much had been accumulated; but he grew old and had not achieved his desire. There palpitated, far above him, an alluring light of influence and leisure.

One night as he listened to Jule's talk of a party at the Methodist church, another plan detached itself spontaneously from his desolate thought. He looked at his son, a man tall and broad, with wide eyes and red lips, and thought of Selma Duncan. It was as if the clouds of his disappointment and fatigue had opened to reveal his desire crowned, walking free, in a yellow cotton dress.

Another night he told his son what he wanted, very sternly to hide a terrible anxiety, hardly expecting to be obeyed. Jule saw his father's twisted hands tremble, and his eyes fill with moisture. He felt neither resentment nor surprise. He commenced a courtship automatically, without decision or design.

The Duncans were the most influential family in the neighbourhood. Old Mr Duncan, a pioneer,

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prominent in church work, had sat in the legislature and owned two farms, the larger of which he rented. His eldest son was a doctor in Milwaukee, a pale man with protuberant eyes and a sparse pointed beard, who came home infrequently. The daughters had graduated from a finishing school in Janesville. The younger was named Theodora or Ted; the elder, Selma, was twenty-five years of age and played the organ in church.

One night in February Jule stopped at home on his way to see Selma. From the barn his father saw the mare tied and blanketed, and came in. "Hello Jule."

"Hello father. How are you feeling?"

His face was white and drawn. "Oh, I'm all right."

"Why do you work so hard? You look tired."

"Oh, no." He filled his pipe, too carefully. "Are you going over to Duncans?"

"Yeah."

"Say Jule, do you think she'll have you? Soon, I mean."

He hadn't asked her. He thought of Hannah; his voice hardened. "Yes, I think so."

"I'm getting old. I'd like to see you settled."

Jule untied the little mare, and the cutter slid in the snowy road. His heart ached, but secretly even from himself, his content was undisturbed. For in his imagination he met the new girl. Narrow

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and straight she swayed from side to side there like a suspended veil. His speculation was of her as he followed the cattle over hills whose grass was like satin, or stooped under the ironwood or crooked plum—what she would think and say. She talked of books and music, or read to him, her eyes dilated with unfamiliar purposes; and a new sensation wooed him. And it seemed that Hannah said nothing and meant nothing. When he left her he was unchanged, nothing was changed; a confusion of sensation and experience reclaimed him, in which he felt helpless and awkward.

The snow creaked under the runners; the mare hurried. From the hill covered with locusts, the lamps of Hill Farm, where the Duncans lived, leaped in the leafless cherries.

Selma agreed to marry him.

He was milking when Hannah came abruptly into the lantern light, her head in a black woolen shawl. Two locks of hair blew before her eyes; her cheeks were marked with cherry; she was beautiful.

"Oh, I'm out of breath! I came around by the road, the snow is so deep."

He smiled at her contentedly, and went on milking.

"Can you come over?"

"I surely can."

"Well I must run back. I've still two cows to milk." She disappeared, slamming the door,

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covered with a velour of frost, behind her.

Then he realized what he had done, and turned suddenly sick. His fingers squeezed the teats mechanically. The sweet-smelling milk beat in the pail; it left a faint tube-shaped mist in the black air. His head drooped heavily against the cow's belly.

More miserable than he had ever been, he took the milk into the house; washed at the kitchen sink, shrinking strangely from the cold water; said nothing to the old man and woman, but went out; and stumbled down the road in the slippery cutter-tracks.

Hannah had finished her chores, and sat in the kitchen, looking indifferently at a farm weekly. Her first glance took in his humour, but she was familiar with many moods and said nothing. He sat down dumbly in a corner.

A lamp threw some green figures on the green wall stained with smoke. Behind the range, the blind Caesar whimpered in his sleep. Jule began to be afraid that he would go away without telling her. His decision shifted like a ball rolled from side to side in a box. Meanwhile a craving for unity, for conclusion, struggled with every more familiar craving.

Hannah waved the large, insignificant pages. Then she rose, put a shade over the lamp, and seated herself in one of two chairs by the window.

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She surveyed the yard, overflowing with moonlight. It dropped conclusively on the worn shingles. The fenceposts were black as ebony. Two paths shovelled in the snow cut the bright space with dark blue ditches. From the hollow arose the glitter of the ice-bound lake, which lay before the brooding woman as if at the bottom of a stair.

In a darkness vibrating with warmth and the anticipation of passion, Jule cowered. At last he came to the chair beside her, weak and miserable. She put one hand gently on his knee. He was beside himself; could neither commence their love-making nor arrest it.

At last he spoke. "Hannah."

"Yes?"

"I have something to tell you."

Before her inclined head, her knotted eyebrows, as if at the foot of a staircase, the ice glimmered. Occasionally a cutter would swim through the moonlight, leaving silver notes of the sleigh-bells to heap and float in the air. The globe of lamplight seemed to revolve. He felt himself sinking in a soft, insane silence, where he struggled.

"My father doesn't want me to go with you."

Her startled, upturned cheek caught the oily moonlight. "Well, I don't see that he has anything to do with it." She stared haughtily, ostensibly without interest.

"He's getting old and he has notions about

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things—what he wants me to do, I mean.”

In a dull voice she repeated after him, “And what does he want you to do?” She bent toward him.

He breathed heavily; he must make her understand; it was his last chance. “He wants me to marry Selma Duncan.”

The girl moved obscurely. “Oh, Selma Duncan. Which one of them is that, the youngest one?”

“No, the tall one with light hair.” She was very still. “Didn’t you ever go to the Methodist church? She plays the organ there.”

“No, I never went. . . .” She shifted slightly in her chair toward him. “Have you been to see her?”

“Yes.”

Scornfully, “Do you think she would have you?”

“Yes, I know she will,” he answered in a low voice.

“Well, have you asked her to marry you?” She laughed softly and harshly.

“Yes, I have.”

There was an empty moment. She struck him in the face. She struck him again and again. She scratched his cheek with her fingernails; and the blood oozed out near his mouth.

After a short struggle, he was able to hold her arms in his large hands. She relaxed. The blood, ebbing out of her face, distorted by anger, left it

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inanimate and dirt-coloured. Some slow tears collected upon her cheeks; they dripped faster and faster. She set her teeth upon cries which were choked and lifeless.

He had never seen her cry. In the struggle her dress had been torn. He stooped and kissed her gloomy flesh, stiff with sorrow and desire.

She held his head against her breast, and ran her fingers through his hair, and wept; and at last a fierce smile appeared and hung upon her lips.

The pulsing blood shook his eyes so that he could not see. And they were dominated by another body, a white electric intellectual outline. Again, the warmth was hot, the sweet too sweet, his strength too strong; but he thought he was free.

He lifted her in his arms and carried her up the steep steps to her bed. Before midnight he trotted down the road, a bright blue trough, toward his home.

#### 4. TO THE BAD

**W**HEN Selma stepped from the train after a short absence Jule regained his content. They had been married three years. She stepped across the spongy April earth, holding her skirts in a gloved hand. He untied the little black mare and got in, clicking his tongue and shaking the reins. Down the wet road from which, in the sunlight, a vapour arose like a large, premature tiger-lily, the mare plodded—her feet and the wheels adding to the confusion of the air by flinging upward drops of water and flecks of mud.

On wooden sidewalks, elevated a foot above the road, the townspeople loitered, and sighed, breathing the perfume of leafage, wet mould, hepaticas, dry horse-dung, and smoke. From piazzas the housewives shook dirty carpets and clothes laterally in the wind. Sparrows ruffled their feathers in the mixed water and muck of the gutter; other birds hung in the undulant air. The white frame church stood among its stone mementoes.

Jule himself had neither aged nor grown fat, but became each year more prosperously gentle. His movement suggested a fixed path about a fixed pole.

## TO THE BAD

Selma had altered more in the years of their marriage. Her face had filled with the signs of a passionate, emphatic virtue. The curious expression had intensified which had come into it in her father's lamp-lighted house, as she listened and seemed almost to doubt his assurances of love: an expression of lonely courage and reliance upon hidden strength. It gave to her eyes, flickering a little under pale-fringed lids, a melancholy keenness, and made of her lips an inverted crescent.

The little mare, now trustworthy and a little slow, symbolized an irrevocable change in the life of her master. She drew them at a jog-trot into the open country. Over the watery fields, trees stood very high, dangling tassels or spotted with buds.

Men in blue shirt-sleeves and overalls stalked about the little pyramids of manure in the fields, now melted and soft, scattered it loosely over the earth, or as the buggy passed, leaned their stubbly chins on the handles of their forks. The manure, soaking in brown rivulets into the earth, sometimes embittered a gust of the wind. One man kicked sullenly at the turds with his raw-hide or rubber boots.

Selma paid no attention to the minute figures in torn coats or denim, or to the trees thick with swollen tubes. Her pale eyes were fixed on a point where the road disappeared in the distance.

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

A mud-hen sat on the corrugated surface of the mill-pond, rocking, gyrating. They drove through Beeler; the noon wood-smoke poured from the short chimneys; they were at home. Selma ran through the summer kitchen to kneel beside her sleeping baby, tears falling from her eyes.

Jule's father was dead; and they lived in his house. One evening Jule had discovered him on a box in the sheep-fold beside a ewe who lay panting on her side. The air was hot with the breath of a hundred others, sleeping in rows and clusters, bitter with the oil which secretes into their wool and the layers of manure under the straw. On the windows the frost of dead winter rested, gigantic and graceful. The ewe groaned, rolling her eyes glassy with fever. The old man nodded to his son; patted the dying animal, and held his ear against her heart.

"I don't seem to be doin' her any good. Come on, let's go to the house," he said, brushing the straw off his knees with a leather mitten.

Before the kitchen fire, their large hands, somewhat swollen with cold, spread out on their knees, he told his father that Selma would marry him.

"That's right," he commented in a tired tone. Jule looked up apprehensively. "Yeah," he said, "I'm tired. I hauled three loads of manure into that back field since I came back from mill. . . .

## TO THE BAD

Look here. You haven't got that Madoc girl into trouble, have you?" He turned his hazel eyes cautiously to the side.

"No, I guess not." His father had never mentioned her before.

The old man nodded wisely over this. "Well, I guess she can take care of herself. Old Madoc . . ." His voice faded away, as he peered at a crack in the stove.

A few weeks later, Jule found him in the sitting-room by a low fire, crouched in a chair. "Hello, father. Done with your milking so soon?"

The answering voice issued from a throat already shrunken. "It's not done. You'd better do it. I'm sick." As he hurried out of the room, the dying voice pursued him, "That two-year-old heifer . . ."

It had taken Jule with two other men a day and a half to dig, through three feet of snow and ice as well as the frozen clay, a shallow grave.

Jule and Selma were married two months after his father's death. He did not want to sell the valuable stock, and had to live at the grey house to care for it. Selma recognized her duty to help him without delay, and also saw in his bewilderment, as he tried to take up his father's life, her first opportunity.

The little Rosalia was now two years old. It had pleased Selma, with her faith in explicit fairness and neat strength, to name her child after his German

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

mother, a kind of symbolic triumph over the disordered darkness out of which she had taken a husband.

The April spring being an illusion of light, the setting sun left the farms clasped in a hand of darkness and wet ominous air. Jule brought in the milk over muddy spaces that seemed to tilt in the wind; washed himself, splashing widely; and carried the drowsy baby up to sleep under the eaves. He sat with his wife, reading a paper idly as she sat over some stockings. The old house groaned and swayed as if about to fall.

Selma's eyes were bright. Beneath a semblance of frailty her love regarded him, zealous and arrogant, questioned the strength and intimacy of the bonds which held him to her, and meditated others more strong. "Do you remember Hannah Madoc?" she asked softly.

"Yes, I do. She lives in Fond du Lac now, doesn't she?"

"I heard of her while I was there. Indeed I saw her once, on the street. But of course she didn't know me."

It seemed to him that in the long interval he had not heard her name spoken. He listened to the wind stalk and crouch above the house. He faced his wife's interest, surprised but cool.

"In Fond du Lac," she said, "they call her Bad

## TO THE BAD

Han." He knotted his chin angrily. She seemed determined as if by instinct to taunt him, to subdue him. His resentment clarified: she was good, he was the purified dross; she was of single purpose, he was diffuse; she was pure, he was impure.

"Of course I had nothing to do with her," she continued, "and indeed shouldn't have known she was there but for poor Mary Harless. You know her husband is a lawyer. I thought her a fool to marry him for he never was a strong character."

He heard her continue on a silvery pitch in the creaking house, thinking only of Hannah. It was a mediocre story, which he barely heard, made terrible by her scorn.

"I met her one day going down Main street, in a black sweater not especially clean, a red straw hat and veil. She strides like a man with her hands in her pockets. She was looking in some windows. She's rather large; must be at least thirty-five, isn't she? Her face was painted.

"They say she worked in Schleger's Hotel when she first went to Fond du Lac and served at the bar. Probably Boyle got her the job. And after a while everybody began to hear how she danced and carried on. Nobody had ever seen her—I mean the women, Mary's friends."

Jule felt sick. He could see it with strange plainness: the mirrors, the tables, the pictures stained with smoke—a woman lying upon maroon-red

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clouds. The gas-light rose and quailed. Her dark hair agog, Hannah danced, doubled in the mirrors. Men sat smoking and laughing on the chairs and tables, their arms on each other's shoulders.

"Finally one of the men's clubs got her to dance at a banquet over the Commercial Club. Mary supposes he saw her there; she is sure he hadn't been going to the saloons and the other places."

The drunken men smiled on her. One sang with his mouth full; he subsided desperately. Jule saw her sway upon her heels as she had always done, stripped of her working clothes, a flower in her hair, swiftly, without music. She stood still in a litter of dirty plates and glasses. She looked about at the muddled faces in the grey air.

The story went on. The wife overheard her disgrace at a Ladies' Aid Society. She neglected everything to cry, mopping her red eyes with a wet handkerchief; she thought she was going crazy.

The wind howled. Jule was cold; something rose and crept about his legs. He closed his eyes.

Selma's voice rang like some silver bells, sweet and cruel. "He's still good looking, but his hair is thin on top and he has pouchy eyes. I talked to him one night and told him how terribly Mary felt and how wrong it was. Finally he said, 'You don't seem to realize, Mrs. Bier, that I love this woman as I never loved Mary. I suppose you won't understand, but she's a much bigger woman.

## TO THE BAD

Mary is shallow. She sings if she has what she wants; if she hasn't, she cries; there isn't anything to her.'

"Of course that's all nonsense and I told him so. I asked him if he thought a woman like that could possibly love him as much as his wife did. He didn't answer at first, but finally he said, very low, 'No, Mrs. Bier.'

"I was surprised. Then I said, 'Isn't it likely, this very minute, that she has other men?' He looked at me coldly and got up to leave the room. But as he went he said, 'Yes, I think she has.'

"I can't feel sorry for such a fool. I don't know what will become of them!" She arose conclusively, and went into the kitchen.

When she returned Jule's head was bent over the table, his face hidden between his arms. "Jule!" she cried. "What is the matter?"

He did not move. "Don't, don't," he said.

She moved slowly backward, clutching her throat with one hand. At last he straightened his body. "You never knew . . ." he said, as if in extenuation.

The new situation was abruptly clear to Selma. She did not stop to renounce her cruelty; the time had come. "Yes, I knew," she said.

"You knew? What did you know?"

The reply was cool and terse. "I heard of your affair with Hannah Madoc, from every side. As soon as you began to come to see me everyone

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talked about it. Ted spoke finally. I said that you had told me all about it; I denied that there had been anything—anything dishonourable. I was only afraid that father would hear of it, for then I couldn't have married you.

“As for us, I wasn't afraid.”

It took a moment for Jule to master the significance of this, which stirred, thickened, and opened like a flower. He was silent, in surprise and wonder, and drew her to him as if she might slip out of his arms.

But she was not done. “Jule, tell me, couldn't you do something for her?” His imagination was tired. “Wouldn't it be better if she came back to her father's farm? It isn't rented this winter, is it?” He was unable to think so far. “You know we've plenty of money if she needs that kind of help. . . .”

He winced, and saw that she had triumphed again, and was satisfied. “Won't you go to Fond du Lac to-morrow and see her?” Selma concluded.

When Jule arrived in the town, he went immediately to an address which Selma had been able to give him: an old house enclosed by an ornamental fence and a plot of sparse grass already faded. As he waited after the noisy bell, he watched a little bright engine switch, belching soot into the delicate

## TO THE BAD

grey sky. The brakeman sang as he coupled the red cars.

He heard a shrill, irritable barking inside the door; and the landlady appeared, framed in the dim glass. Her feet shuffled in grey felt bedroom-slippers as she bore, with the majesty of excessive fat, down the obscure hall. She unbolted and swung back the door. Her pale blue dressing-gown revealed her corpulent legs to the knee. On her uncorsetted hip she carried a pet poodle, which continued to bark meanly, opening with each sound, under its dirty forelocks, a pale, dripping mouth. Jule was dumb before her sightless, proud stare. Under a blotched red rough forehead, her eyes shrank from the bright light.

"Well, who do yuh want to see?" she demanded.

"Does Hannah Madoc live here?" He hoped he had come to the wrong place.

"Why yes, she does, but she's not here now, and I don't think she'll be back much before night."

"Oh . . ."

The poodle squirmed in one of her fat hands. Her capacious body rolled inside her dirty gown. "Don't stan' there in the door and let the cold air in on us. Are yuh comin' or goin'?"

"May I leave a message?" He stepped into the dirty hall, with odours pouring down the handsome staircase over its frayed rug and seeping under the

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closed doors. As he took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on a scrap of paper against the wall, the woman paused on the threshold. She peered hungrily up and down the street, waved a solemn hand at someone, and slammed the door. The filthy dog snuffled at his shoes.

It was a little past two. He walked the stale streets without thought or purpose. The sun descended methodically, a colourless spot upon the vapours. Alley-cats darted across the city, mounting posts or trees, their fur fine and unkempt like monkey's.

Farmers drove into the stable-yards behind the hotels and blanketed their fat horses, who had not shed the ragged winter fur. He went into Schleger's and drank a glass of beer. The bar was crowded with hoarse-voiced men. The sour odour of beer and tobacco was mixed with that of rubber-boots, manure, and dirty corduroy. He talked of the weather and crops with one, and his eyes roamed over the familiar place; the tables and chairs whose rigid, spindling legs had been dirtied by many feet, the unclean mirrors and unpolished brass spittoons, on the wall the begrimed woman spread out upon maroon clouds. From time to time, someone would go down to the sheds and untie the horses, sluggish with a winter's rest, and drive away into the country.

He went out then, and wandered through the wan-

## TO THE BAD

ing afternoon toward the north-west, looking wistfully everywhere. Women rustled past, swaying their huge skirts and gazing querulously beneath their hat-brims. As the setting sun brought about on the horizon a pallor like a rising wind-storm, he reached the country. The prairie stretched westward colourless and vast; and the man was moved. The hills and marshes about his home were not like this sea of land. On its dullness the long fences were minute, the houses and high barns small cubes and pyramids; men and horses moving from one spot to another were inconsiderable and perfect, held in the still, indifferent space.

Then he turned back. Main Street was straight and sharp, pointed at each end into the black, emptied prairie. Gas lamps punctured the surface of the night as it approached. New people were on the streets, lamps accented unnoticed windows. Between the closed stores uncarpeted staircases rose like flues, lighted by flickering red and yellow jets. On the theatre the wind rattled large posters, announcing a musical show with Billie Dowland's Picked Beauties. Young men strutted with cigars, slapping each other's backs.

On the second floor of a rickety building some bright windows bore letters which spelled Chop Suey. Jule walked aimlessly up the stairs, and looked in. The plaster walls were painted with orange dragons. The uncarpeted floor held up

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

flimsy tables and chairs among which, in a gliding motion like accelerated snails, moved waiters with showy yellow faces. One of the women raised toward him her tulip-coloured cheeks and blacked eyes in a silly, arrogant stare. When a waiter slid toward the door to usher him in, he hurried down the stairs.

He turned down a side-street toward Hannah's house. He saw two negro women, tittering, waving their heads together, and the snowy crack of their teeth as they smiled in the dark. They were like two animals playing in a thicket. A smiling man walked eagerly on thick haunches. Under the night were caverns and tracks and runways.

A man answered the door-bell and after bawling "Hannah!" twice in a colossal voice, told him to "go right up-stairs." Out of an obscure passage in which a yellow tongue of gas licked the air incessantly, she admitted him to her warm lamplight.

"Jule, Jule why have you come at last?" she murmured.

He was bewildered. She was older than his memory, older than he, older than any one. The face was like a mask of stone, the torso heavy and soft.

"Sit down my dear," she said, "over there by the window where I can look at you." He sat down, and for a time they kept silent, in an inventory of aspects and recollections.

## TO THE BAD

Her hair was cut short above the shoulders and combed smoothly back, streaked with grey. She wore a loose red dress in which her prodigal flesh lay as if in a casket. Her look was bleak and deserted. A compression of scorn narrowed her thin, painted lips. An awful resentment, a resentment pointless and humble, rose with her tenderness, to strain his comprehension to the utmost, to wrench his contentment almost from its place.

When she stood up he knew by her movement that the vast, beautiful body was tired. It would deteriorate; its fantastic beauty would become gross; its magnitude be mere fat. She stirred heavily. He seemed to see her in a frayed kimono bear down a dusky hall with sleepy dignity, her hand licked by a poodle.

The clothes-closet stood open, revealing a chaos of cheap clothes. The dresser was littered with bottles, cigarettes, ashes, and stubs. The eyes of a middle-aged man, in a picture pinned against the mirror, covered the room with a vain, unsatisfied glare.

Hannah sighed, and attempted to smile; but the bleak mask did not relax. "Have you had supper? I'm hungry." Her voice was deep, like lowing steers in the marshes. Her dark eyes swept over the walls restlessly.

"No. I forgot to get any. Let's go out." He picked up his leather bag.

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

"Leave it here," she said, "till we come back."

He hesitated. "I'm not going to stay here tonight, you know." He could not see her face.

"Oh, you're not," she said lightly.

After supper, as they walked northward toward the lake, men, standing in front of cigar stores, called Hello to her through the gusty air, but she did not answer. The sky swung like the top of a tent as the wind rose up to rain. They came to the edge of Lake Winnebago. Little, slender, leafless trees stood around and waved their hands and seemed about to kneel. The waves came up to the white stone slabs deposited in a wall, with the sound of fish smacking their lips and flicking their fins and tails.

Gathering the cheap fur of her coat up over her face, Hannah began to cry. The large tears rolled on her rouged cheeks.

It began to sprinkle around them on the thick, budded branches, striking the sides of the little fish who seemed to lift their fins in the lake. They hurried arm-in-arm down the street. In the light jetting from doors and windows, they saw the drops fall far apart in the air out of which the wind had lapsed entirely.

They were glad of the prying light, of the warmth of paper roses as red as tomatoes, and spread their wet coats on the backs of chairs to dry.

## TO THE BAD

Then he told her, slowly and methodically, what he wanted her to do. Curiously, not upon her face, but beneath her face, there was an amazed and excited expression. She looked old, untidy, and goaded by petty troubles. The menacing yap of the poodle bounded up the stairs.

“. . . you were always a good hand at a garden and you could keep a cow.”

She drifted, a little dazed, into the practical aspects of his plan.

“The farm is so heavily mortgaged. It might be hard . . .”

“I’ve plenty of money since I got married,” he said.

Her eyes widened. “Does your wife know about this?”

“Yes, she does.”

She took his brown hand in her strangely pale hand, her fat hand covered with showy rings. She had assumed that the strangeness of a new wife had worn away, and he had come back to her. Now a new and difficult concept thrust itself into her thought. She saw in it an opportunity to cling to him, the only opportunity to cling to him. She fondled his hard hand.

Her stare was stern. She breathed heavily. To his simple vision everything seemed insubstantial: the flagrant paper flowers, the lace, the litter, the

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envelope of cheap red satin, the overabundance of her flesh—all hanging loose, ready to be stripped away.

She lifted her large face, as if she could smell the sour marsh wind.

## 5. LOCAL GOD

**H**ANNAH arrived at the house on the marsh in time to put in a garden: her father's house—the green stained walls, the floor painted grey and pitted with boot-nails, the steep staircase with the middle of each step worn away. As soon as a bed and a cook-stove had been set up she moved in, and put on an old black skirt and a denim jacket.

She stalked up and down in the garden. In the dry loam, brown leaves were crumpled on their spines. Cabbage stalks rotted and stunk in orderly rows. In a corner she found some parsnips and dug them up. She laid them in a tin pan, washed them in the milky stream of the wooden pump, and sat on the back porch, cutting and brushing them for her dinner.

She sat on the steps. Through the open door the wind carried out over her the must of a house closed through the winter. Wild cucumbers sprouted in the melancholy ground. Beneath her feet was the spot where her father fell. She shaded her eyes, and saw nothing but vast husks and dead pools. There was a faint sound of hidden movement—of water bubbling through the sod, of sap in the spiny stalk, and shoots in the dead clump.

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The birds seemed to lean over the ground to hear it with their small, lobeless ears, the sun to bend a round yellow ear.

The marsh earth seemed fatigued, and bitter that, within its age, this youth surged. Hannah sighed as she put her parsnips over the stove.

Then she spaded the garden. When at dusk the old crows loosed their wings in the lustre of the sun toward the roost in the oaks, one third of the garden lay black and like plush. The next day she finished the spading, and began to rake and lay it off in rows and rectangles. She planted radishes, lettuce, beets, cauliflower, cabbage, and melons, each in its time.

At first she bought her food: butter, eggs, milk, and meat from her neighbours; coffee, flour, salt, and sugar from Boyle's. Whistling to herself, the tall woman wandered down the Beeler street, observing with a cynical smile the alterations in its spiritless façade—the new sidewalks, porches, the taller trees, the duller or fresher paint on each flank of clapboards, the unfamiliar faces; and she saw Mrs. Boyle as soon as she passed the church. The pale woman sat on the cement platform, sewing. When she saw Hannah she dropped her cloth, her needle, and scissors. Her cry of amazement brought Boyle to the door of the saloon, where he stared sleepily; two damp strings of hair dropped from their places on his bald forehead into his eyes.

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She walked among her old neighbours strangely and proudly. They whispered behind her, not daring to ask questions. Where did she get the money with which she bought their butter and eggs? What did it mean, this rash and unexpected beauty falling away to a premature old age? They stopped their teams in the road by her garden to talk. "Well Hannah, so you've come back to live on the old place."

"Yes, I've come back. You might have known I would."

"Shan't you be lonesome all by yourself in the house?"

"Oh, no, I'm used to being alone." And the old man and woman in a democrat or lumber-wagon clucked to the horses, shook the reins over their fat or bony backs, and went on, baffled.

In Hannah's ears the creak of the axles mingled with the blackbirds on the marshes behind her back. She tried to shake off the lethargy which seemed to pull her downward, the craving to lie down. She jerked her arms and struck a clod with her hoe. She began to tremble with a lust to throw herself flat on the ground, to roll on the dry loam, to press against the earth, to crush the lettuce and red beet-tops. The tears came into her eyes; and her curious face was distorted. She dropped the hoe and strode into the house, her fingernails cutting her palms.

The afternoon was troubled by a cloud which

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swelled into a twilight full of rushing sound. The pale, ivory-stemmed green trees threshed together along the horizon. Over a black sky strips of cloud moved like horses. At seven it rained. Hannah stood by the back door of the barn looking out over the marshes.

The rain beat the drum of the hollow building with many sticks. The tragic scraps of meaning, the flakes of order and bits of melody rose and fell; they aroused the ear and were obliterated.

At intervals the lightning revealed that vast plain, tufted with bogs, spread with water, the minute trees waving their tops, the cobalt tamarack swamp, the slippery hills like apples of granite; a vision ethereal and sharp, but so swift that her maddened eyes could not hold it. She leaned outward, in a dumb agony, suspended between flash and flash, which denied her, until the rain from the roof splashed on her face.

The barren woman stretched like a ewe in labour; she sank, sobbing, to her knees on the barn floor; she lifted her face where the disturbed, angular bats fluttered up and down.

The next day a woman knocked at her door. The woman started at the sight of her abrupt eyes and haggard face; she sat nervously on the edge of a chair, and asked Hannah to work for her; she was with child, sick and afraid, and needed help.

The younger woman quailed before Hannah's

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stolid regard. "So it's your first one and you're afraid?" she repeated harshly. Then more kindly, and with a certain condescension, "All right, I'll help you till you get a girl if you like, but I can't come to stay."

The other rubbed her long, chapped hands along her arms. "I should think you'd like it better than bein' here alone. Don't you get awful lonesome?"

Hannah winced a little. "Oh, no," she said.

This gave her a profession, the profession of general help. Whoever stopped at her door was in trouble, and seemed to prefer her cynical temper, her coarse pity and relief, to the unruffled sympathy of better women. She cared for the sick; was not afraid of scarlet fever; cured sick animals; shot old horses and those with broken legs; laid out the dead. The doctors tolerated and finally recommended her. She became the established midwife of the poor.

Her aid, invoked at first in practical difficulties, gradually widened in scope. Women and girls stopped, often secretly, at the marsh house for instruction and advice. Nevertheless, she remained somehow conspicuously unaccompanied. She remained at her father's house; and when her irregular occupations took her away from it, she hired a neighbour's boy to look after the stock.

This had been acquired at an auction a few miles down the road. Jule was there and they walked

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together through the barns, talking as they paused before the cattle uneasy and murmuring in the wooden stanchions, or while he ran a practiced hand down a horse's leg for a spavin.

The women in hats which elevated willow plumes like horses' manes stared at Hannah—bareheaded, striding with the men. She thrust her hands in the pockets of an old grey sweater, and tossed her short hair. The women, clustered around the household furniture on the ragged June grass under some elms, whispered of her and her friend.

The auctioneer, his unshaven cheek bulbous with tobacco, stood on a box and began the sale. He shouted in exalted haste, "What am I bid what am I bid, somebody start it off somebody start it off! Six who'll make it seven, six who'll make it seven, seven who'll make it eight. . . ."

The cattle and horses were led in one by one. The black bull stared contemptuously at those who stepped back to give him room. The men glanced over their shoulders in surprise when Hannah bid in a loud voice. She bought a cow, twelve hens, and a rooster.

The next day she drove her cow home through the winnowed June air with a long, leafy switch; and carried the chickens in a gunny sack, six at a time. In its season she took her cow to a neighbour's bull, and each spring had a calf to sell. She made

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dandelion wine when the first shoots unknotted in the grass.

Often, as he passed to the mill or store, Jule tied his sleek horses at her fence. If the day was pleasant they sat on the porch overlooking the swamp. The blackbirds would be flocking, or triangles of ducks descend in the wet meadows. She spread a red cloth on the table and set out her oldest wine and a plate of cookies spotted with caraway. They talked of the crops, of little Rosalia, of the gossip of their neighbours. The man to whom she rented her large fields did not manage well; they discussed his mistakes. Often they sat for half an hour in silence, under the cucumber vines, the heat ribbing the air over the wild acres. With red, heavy fingers she stuffed her pipe, and sat smoking, tapping her foot to a tune she remembered. Jule got up and hurried off, whistling like a boy.

Instinctively she hid from him the signs of her hopeless solitude; how dry the bread for which she had exchanged every contact and every illusion.

In the diversity of her activities the years passed quietly. A doctor taught her to gather ginseng for the market, and sent her into the swamps to hunt the slender, hairy roots.

She bought traps, and set them along the marsh river and its creeks. She arranged them in a

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

circuit, and visited them each morning, trudging in high boots through the drifts. The sun made a glitter like fallen sheets of metal. Her opaque breath moved before her. As morning advanced, the glittering ice dropped from the bare branches, puncturing the crust. She followed yesterday's tracks, or if there had been a storm, going more slowly, she made a new mark on the arid expanse.

She knew the footprint of every wild thing. She found a track by a fence or stone-pile, staked her trap, and baited it with a strong meat, a dead hen or rooster. The wind ruffled the red feathers on the shell of snow.

Below her house the river current was delayed and a pond formed between scarred and dying tamaracks. The musk-rats built their mounds there, like dung-hills, of dead leaves, reeds, and cat-tails. Mink and ermine, very slowly, leaped like greyhounds to the water's edge, and peered in the black stream where it babbled from the frayed ice.

Excitedly, gulping the strong air, she would approach the known place. Perhaps the bait would be as she had left it, but frozen stiff. Or the meat would be gone, the iron jaws sprung. Or there would be a circle cut in the snow, stained with blood as the captive pulled at its paw in the saw-toothed trap; in the centre a frantic thing, hissing, snarling, baring its teeth. Sometimes a skunk gnawed its own wrist and left the paw behind.

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When she was hungry for meat, she took her gun and went to the woods. In every season there were rabbits, grey and fox squirrels, partridge, and sometimes a fat, young coon. The moss yielded to her wide feet. She rested on a fallen tree, her strong hips and breasts shaping to the rigid bark, to the iron limbs. The carved green leaves swung upon her frayed clothes, her dusky, wrinkling skin.

She had no ambitions and few amusements. In the earlier years a man would sometimes stop at the marsh house. They would be drunk; and Hannah would imagine, for a few hours, a fissure of light in the dullness of her life. It became gradually dim in her mind, so thin and fleeting was every satisfaction, why she had chosen this lonely, difficult life, why she had given up the company and vices by which ordinary solitude is slightly disguised. In these promiscuous romances, rough, ragged, and cold, a yearning always arose which answered these questions at a time when the answers, and the memories which flanked them—Jule's dark face, his curls clustering over his ears, the cut wheat and horned moon—roused her to anguish. In the night a brief quaver of revelry came from her house, little and helpless in the loud sigh of grasses erect in water, of branches overlaid by branches—the wide fecundity unused and unbeloved.

She listened simply to these replies of circumstance. The idea of cleaving as closely as she was

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permitted to Jule, though sometimes tenebrous, was her one personal idea. As she grew older it worked itself into the grain of her life, and she existed by it automatically.

She became an old woman in her middle age, feeding her fowls, pushing a wheelbarrow of corn for her cow, or resting on her back porch in the bent, evening sunlight. The tokens of August enclosed her: a few ribbed pie-pumpkins, a festoon of sweet-corn seed tied by the husk, black crests of dill like feathers in the yellow air. Her short grey stiff hair gave to her head a square solidity; her crooked eye-brows bent over two pits, from which thrust her hard, straight gaze; her broad cheeks hung from the cheek-bones and were veined with minute red threads. She smoked a pipe; and the smoke swung upward and hung in the air.

The sun was stained and thickened toward the horizon. The little cow's shiny horns curved upward together. On the cropped lawn the first bogs lay like a pile of melons. Beyond—vast, strange, and dramatic—spread the marsh, Hannah's companion. Its spotted pools palpitated; its grasses flickered and troughed; on the horizon its narrow, wiry-stemmed trees rose and fell like flails. Flocks of birds blew over it, their pale breasts turning; the air divided into bundles of their cries. It required no labour; it held out the lure and responsibility of

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no harvest; it obeyed no law. It twisted and stormed, without repentance; it gave what was taken from it without complaint.

A woman hurried up Hannah's lane with a child in her arms. Her face was formed of concave ovals with a blue shadow at the bottom of each; her pink mouth was reckless and resentful. She almost ran to the porch where Hannah sat.

"Oh, Hannah can't you help me? I don't know what——"

"Let's see," Hannah interrupted. "You're Annie McKee, ain't you?" She knocked her pipe on her heel.

"Oh, I'm so tried. I don't know what'll become of us." She sank on the edge of the porch, gasping foolishly; the chalk-white baby whimpered.

"Now, stop your fussing and talk plain. What's the matter with you?"

"Well I'm all alone, and six young ones, and the stock— You see they've put my man in jail for a month. And my sister can't come for three days——"

"What in God's name for?"

"For whippin' his horses. Oh, my Gawd he's awful with 'em, I know. Ted Duncan—Mrs. Strane—complained. But what can I do? My sister can't come yet and——"

"And I suppose you've come to get me," Hannah grumbled sternly. "Every damned woman in this

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township runs to me for everything. One of 'em's big with child and doesn't know what to do—Lord knows I wasn't to blame for it—another's baby's got the croup, another's neighbour's dog has stolen her meat . . . and I'm an old woman. And here I have to run around like a chicken with its head cut off. I'm tired, I tell you."

"But what shall I do?" the woman wailed.

"Oh, hush, hush! I'm coming. For how long?"

"Only three days."

Hannah scolded calmly to herself as she put on a big coat and took up her knotty stick behind the stove. As she slammed her door, she said, "We'll have to stop and tell Robins' boy to milk my cow."

When she returned home she found a boy and a girl on the porch. The light lay in soft, close plumes; and the sky was like a spray of aster. The lovers rose awkwardly.

"Willy Robins said you were coming back to-night and we thought we'd wait."

"That's all right," she said, "but I can't sit around twiddling my thumbs with you two. I've got a cow to milk."

"Well I guess we can help you, can't we?" the boy said.

"Little enough help you'll be." The cow made a welcoming vibration, rolling her egg-shaped, velvet eyes. The boy threw down some hay from the mow; and she trotted in. They sat on a pile of pale

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straw, the girl's apron a splash of colour in the swinging ball of lantern-light. While Hannah milked, they talked, shyly and nervously only at first.

To her simple eye nothing was degrading, nothing evil; everything formed a single difficult pure coil—moralless and pure. So she spoke more plainly and more strongly than other men and women, the faultless, the prosperous, or the strong.

The young faces were happy and flushed. She turned the cow up the lane, carried her milk to the house, lit a lamp; and they left her, two moving shadows over the veiled grass. Her eyes sometimes filled with tears.

That night she lay, as she often did, sleepless and unsatisfied at the edge of sleep; and rose before sunrise, and began to pull and stack the bean-vines. She worked fiercely all day, milked her cow early, and strode down the corduroy road. Her content was unbroken by what happened or did not happen; but over it often surged these fits of restlessness in which she turned to the earth for comfort.

This August evening held her in its embrace. The lake was covered with three-cornered scales, and under them floated the strawberry bass, marked with little leaves and seeds of fire. Light fell in great flakes, and rose again in flakes to the low, amber sun.

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Hannah crouched on logs and stones, and watched the round, enamelled turtles dry and fade, and swim again. A heron heaved into the sky, its long, lacquer-coloured legs scoring the green bay.

She walked up the river, jumping from bog to bog, from root to root where the ground was insubstantial. The inflamed air, the violent hues aged and faded to a passive, enduring twilight. The little stream threaded among snowy stones between pools of glass. The great bitterns retreated up stream, their peaked noses declined between their hunched shoulders. Hannah followed them; and they jumped squawking into the twilight and took refuge in black, thick trees. She lay down in the warm, rasping grass; and the bitterns returned, three and three in military order, turning their heads to discover her with a row of eyes like the eyes of fish.

She rose and wandered on, her bushy grey head vacillating among shrubs and branches. The dark, when it came, did not confuse her feet. Instinctively she skirted the dangerous mire, singing to herself tunelessly. On and on, after midnight, among great blocks of moonlight which struck the pools and made the scarred tamaracks glitter like angels over the pitch-black roots.

She came to a wheat-field and lay down in it and slept, pillowing her head on the ribbed bundles. Solitude in the form of anguish did not exist now;

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and sometimes the face of her lost boy lover appeared in her dreams.

Often she stayed all night in the woods and fields. When the autumn or spring nights were cold and wet, she made her bed in a barn or under a straw-stack. Once she found a herd of cattle on the brow of a hill, and lay down among them.

As she grew old, she withdrew from the daily life of the people. Some hesitated to interrupt the curious preoccupation in which she visibly moved; others she repulsed sternly, saying "I have other work to do." Her strength was spent in obscure hurryings, upon mysterious errands and appointments. The old woman was faithful to no tangible thing but her cow. In the common mind, she grew legendary, a mad old object of rags and dirt, a glance direct as an axe, a mop of iron-grey hair. Her figure agitated against the sunset in empty lanes, or proclaimed itself with an abrupt shout from a dark thicket or hollow. One met her on the roads, or found her in her garden: straw in her hair, an ethereal light in her eyes, a serene, incomprehensible smile on her square leather-coloured face.

This expression always brought her neighbours back to the enigma of her existence—her contacts, her episodes, her memories. The end of her life threw one lurid illumination upon it, but left the mass in a compelling and endless mystery.

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It was late September in her forty-first year that she returned somewhat late from Beeler, and hurried to the barn to milk her cow. The fawn-coloured Jersey, the fifth in succession, waited beside a trough of black water rayed with violet from the bright sky. She murmured and trotted to her manger in the barn. Hannah took down a lantern from its hook and lit it, and stood by the half-door. A vague radiance was suspended from the west like a scarf.

Over the cow, across one end of the barn like a shelf in a cupboard, was a hay-loft about fifteen feet from the floor. She tossed a pitchfork into it, and with her lantern in her hand, climbed slowly up the narrow ladder to throw down hay. She pushed it in great bundles to the floor. Then she dropped the fork into the pile, took the lantern from a nail, and started down. She caught her foot on a loose board at the edge of the loft, and fell.

The lantern cut a great arc in the air, which ended, luckily, in darkness and a crash of glass. The little cow shook her stanchion, and uttered a long, resonant sound. Hannah lay unconscious on her back, her face turned upward, her arms thrown out at her sides, her legs crumpled horribly under her heavy body.

The night was barred with streaks of consciousness. In them her agony rose and rose in complicated peaks, one upon another, from which she

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fell. The moon came up, and shone through the door in gigantic slabs. Toward morning the hungry, neglected cow bellowed constantly. Once she woke in a cool interlude bare of sensation; she seemed to float and poise, weightless, endless, sorrowless; she drank the cold, early air as if she were the tube of a flower.

That morning was full of balm and light. Along the twisted roads, where the goldenrod stooped and nodded, a girl ran. She turned down Hannah's lane, pale and panting; called her name, leaped up the steps, and rapped on the door; then ran to the barn. The little cow looked up gratefully.

Instinctively the girl realized Hannah's presence in the barn. Her terror poured out. "Oh, Hannah, mother has a fit and she's so sick, and pa's away, and can't you come over! We're so scared and there's nobody to send for the doctor. She's lying on the floor. Can't you come, right away—" The shrill staccato of her own voice stopped her; her gaze dropped to the floor.

She screamed. Hannah had not been able to move. The face was iron-grey. The mouth was tight across the bottom of it in a broken angle. The mouth moved to a voice—small, alto, and acute. "Don't scream. Don't run away," it said. "Your mother'll be all right. I won't. Go to Robins'. Tell the men to come."

Almost too sick to stir, the child crept out of

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reach of the horrible bright eyes, and in the yard got command of herself enough to run.

A little crowd poured through the barn-door. It divided, and recoiled in a wide semicircle around the hurt woman. The people were too terrified, for a moment, to think or move.

In that moment the amazing voice began again. "Carry me into the house. I'll faint, but it doesn't matter."

The men found a plank, picked up her heavy body, the legs inert, and laid her on the plank, carried her slowly through the yard, and put her on a bed. Then the men stood on the porch, muttering to one another.

The house was bare, dirty, disorderly. The women hovered about the feet of the massive, unconscious woman. At last her hand moved; one leaned toward her. "Somebody'd better go over to Mrs. Bruter's. She's prob'ly still in her fit. The girl told . . ."

Her eyelids flickered together. She collected visibly all her strength. "Now do as I tell you. It's high time somebody went for a doctor if anybody's going. And I want him to stop and tell Jule Bier. Tell him to come." Her eyes seemed to whirl in their sockets, and by a gigantic effort were focussed on the terrified neighbour.

Jule leaped up the steps into the kitchen. The women, fussing around the stove, scattered and

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withdrew to the porch. He fell on his knees by the bed. He pressed his lips to her coarse, stained, inert hands. She did not look at him; but the tears pushed out on her wide, iron-grey cheeks.

Young Mrs. Robins suddenly detached herself from the cluster of whispering women on the porch, and set out over the fields. She hurried down roads and lanes, her apron folded over her head like a sunbonnet, until she came into Selma Bier's summer kitchen. She stood there sullenly, her round face contracted in a pout of suspicion. "Hannah Madoc is sick, and Mr. Bier has come. I've said I'd nurse her, and I thought I'd tell you, now he has come . . . I don't want to do it if it's not all right."

Selma trembled and turned pale. She turned on the other woman fiercely. "Go right back, Mrs. Robins. Of course it's all right. Hannah is one of our oldest friends. How dare you! Why, she may be dying."

Mrs. Robins returned, ashamed and bewildered. The doctor came. He sat down in the litter around the bed, very brief and cold. Nothing could be done; the hip was broken, and the other leg; the heart was too bad to risk setting them; mortification had already set in. She turned her face indifferently away from him until he rose. Then she collected some tragic, dying syllables and said, "Good-bye doc-tor." He took her hand. He paused on the lawn to give medicine and instruc-

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tions to Jule. "A good woman, in her way," he said.

She lived almost two days. Jule did everything for her: lifted her, fed her, gave her morphine; never left her bed. Selma drove over for a moment the second morning to inquire and bring provisions.

That morning Hannah asked to be moved to the door. Jule and Mrs. Robins pushed the bed across the room, and piled up her pillows so that she could look across the marshes.

The air was heaped up like shining wheat. Autumn had fallen on the wide, harvestless acres; a stern brilliance of sumach, of nosegays of blood-red wild leaves, of berries and rosehaws, of stripped, mahogany and silver twigs.

Jule sat close to Hannah. Their eyes, when they did not run out over the marsh, were fixed upon each other; his gaze abstract, as if it gleaned then from her sunken, unlighted face her wisdom and her peace; the dying woman's wistful and proud, who entrusted her existence, from that moment, to his thought.

BOOK TWO  
ROSALIA

“In other matters we may be deceived by false appearances; and as the wise man complains, *hardly do we guess aright at the things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us.* But here the mind has all the evidence and facts within herself;—and is conscious of the web she has wove;—knows its texture and fineness, and the exact share which every passion has had in working upon the several designs which virtue or vice has planned before her.”

THE SERMON IN TRISTAM SHANDY

*Laurence Sterne*



## 1. AROUND THE DEAD

**T**HE boar stood dark and lonely in the wet light. Overhead the spring clouds quivered heavily, pallid and tinged with black. His minute, ominous eyes, winking steadily under his ears, swept the yard. It was empty but for a little hen, drilling with her beak in a piece of cowbeet, crushed and dropped from his mouth. Through the bristles like thorns his grey hide was visible, scored with wrinkles and slime-caked. The huge animal could move nimbly on his short legs; but the cleft hoofs, unworn in the circumscribed space, curled upward in dead and deformed half-moons. The skull jutted over the peeping, tragic eyes; and the short jaws champed irritably under the wet snout.

One day when Jule had put a neighbour's sow in his shed, the animal lunged at him, drove him into a corner, and would have struck him with his tusks had he not been able to swing himself out of the way on the rafters.

Jule sold him soon after; and a farmer came to take him away. By coaxing and beating, they got him into a large crate. The man backed his team and wagon around to it; and he and Jule lifted the

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front of the crate and rested it on the wagon-box. Then they gripped the back end where the bulk of the enormous hog rested, intending to slide it up into the wagon. When they had heaved it from the ground, the boar lunged in his confinement; the other man's fingers slipped; Jule struggled with it alone, lest it crush his legs as it fell; the board he held tore out its nails; the boar in the crate dropped; Jule leaped aside and fell on his back and fainted away. The shouts of the other man brought the women running from the house.

The old doctor trailed his greenish coat-tails down the porch steps, leaving him stretched out in his overalls. Rosalia stood above him, fingering his stiff grey curls, her eyes full of tears. Her mother, pale but firm, still talked with the doctor beside his mud-splashed car. Jule could not dissemble the pallor of his sunburned face from which the blood had flowed away, or the inertness of his trunk on the spindle-legged sofa. It was a rupture, and his days of hard work were over. Already he thought of renting his large fields, and wondered where he could get a good man to care for the stock.

The store-keeper told him about Mike Byron who lived in Mayville. He poked down the muddy path, clambered cautiously into the democrat, and went after him. He found a man of twenty-five, his sharp nose ruddy between freckled cheeks, his eyes

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active, his lips generous and unstable. The two liked one another; and Mike put a straw suitcase under the seat and got into the wagon beside his employer.

Mike Byron's father had ignored his existence. He had been a well-to-do farmer, but had become a sick, impoverished drunkard. He had maintained a company of friends until forced to hoard his nickels and dimes to pay for his own drinks, and earned a bare living in hotel stables, or emptying spittoons and sweeping the sidewalks in front of the bars. Filthy and irritable, the saliva from his drooping lips stringing to a greasy vest, the orange lids raised ironically above his sunken eyeballs, he mumbled and cursed over his broomstick. When drunk he was in peace, and lay on the manure piles behind the stables looking through the willows toward the river which shook into little white waves in the evening light, and always spoke with indifference of the headache and vomiting which followed a few hours later.

Mike's mother, foreseeing her husband's career, had set aside before her death a sum of two thousand dollars to be spent on his education. He was in high school when his father sold the mortgaged farm and moved to town, and he went a few months later to Madison, where he stayed for three years, studying fitfully. A vague discontent with human

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lives had made him religious as a boy; and he had begun to prepare for the ministry. Then he wanted to be a doctor, and took pre-medical courses. This ambition wore itself out; and he went to Milwaukee and worked for a year on a morning paper. He tired of this, and went back, with the last of his mother's money, to the agricultural college. Then he thought only of cattle and crops, and was looking for a job on a farm when Jule found him.

He studied his new friends. They were good people with kind manners, but mere kindness did not satisfy his imagination. The three with whom he lived and the other three at Hill Farm—John Strane and Mrs. Strane and Dan, the boy of fifteen—attracted him; he thought of their secrets, their sensations; and his face filled with fever. That which kept him awake was not merely a desire for intimacy, but a curiosity which undertook to rebuild men and women with the elements it could discover, and missed the mysterious ingredients which distinguished one from the other. He felt ignorant and shut out; and the kind faces seemed to taunt him because he could not understand them.

He came up to bed covered with sweat. His body was stippled over with loam which had chafed into the air; and his heels were black. The coarse cotton sheets were moist, and gave off a bitter odour. Little of the sluggish air pressed through the rusty screen on the window; and his shirt and

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overalls smelled strongly of horses and cattle. He licked his lips, and thought of the animals moving uneasily in their stalls, where their feet rested on the cold wet straw, or lying on the thick, faintly acid, green, upland turf. They too thwarted him; but he thought that they knew as much of his loneliness as his friends. He decided to go to the stables, kicked off the sour sheets, but lay still and slept.

The next morning Dan brought the news from Hill Farm that his grandfather Duncan lay dead in his bed when they went to wake him. Mrs. Bier burst into tears and fell on her knees by the brown sofa in prayer. Mike tiptoed past the door, and saw Jule on the porch talking soberly with his daughter, and motioned to the boy who was crushing some butternuts with a stone to come with him into the barn. The melancholy lips of the young boy moved nervously as he began to speak. In his blue eyes there was a haughty innocence; and under two horns of sand-coloured hair his eyebrows hooked upward arrogantly. He shrank from the calves' wet muzzles, and looked down to set his feet only on clean straw.

The funeral of the old man collected the family in an orderly row before the coffin banked with flowers. His two daughters were seated in the middle, with Theodora's son and Selma's daughter; and

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the two husbands sat at the ends. The old man's head, lying in its bed of chiffon, seemed a model for the faces of his children and their children. His bluish nostrils curved proudly, and as if his death agony had been a sweet wind blowing upon his mouth, it opened slightly in an expression of ecstasy.

In five rows of chairs across the sad solid parlor, the farmers sat with their wives, red-faced, dull, and powerful, unlike the mourning family. Their thick knees seemed to stretch their skirts and trousers. Their shoes were grey with dust, and in the tin hooks some grass was caught.

Mike's eyes moved from them to the coffin: the decent black fabric glued over the raw wood; the substantial nickel-plated handles for the cotton-gloved hands of the pall-bearers; the pasted plaits and effete cushions of chiffon into which the corpse sank heavily. The bay window in which it lay was thrust full of blossoms, hothouse roses and tattered carnations and freesia. The farmers breathed cautiously, as if it were sickening, of the sweet air, which Rosalia and Dan seemed to inhale with curiosity and surprise.

The minister knelt by a cane-bottomed chair to pray. His muscular hands opened and closed. He was a little heavy-bellied man who wore over his under-thrust jaw a ragged moustache, through which a truculent voice came unevenly. Mike

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watched the heads of the beautiful girl and the boy incline under the blended terror and arrogance of the prayer.

"The minister," Dan told him as they drove together to the cemetery, "was Grandfather's favourite. He used to be in the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. He sang and preached in the streets with a little folding organ till his voice failed."

Mike supposed he was a "hell-fire preacher."

The boy paused, wrinkling his eyebrows. "Well," he said, "the life in a big city like that must be terribly impure, and such men do a lot of good. Their ideas change to fit their experience, of course. . . ."

"What do you mean by impure?" Mike interrupted.

"Oh, immorality, sexual immorality, debauchery," the boy replied soberly.

"In my opinion," Mike began, "everything is pure, everything is good that doesn't hurt somebody else. Life is dull enough if we have all the fun there is."

"But there is duty. . . ."

"Our duty is to be happy," Mike said. He saw that the muscles of the haughty but generous face tightened with a kind of pleasure.

Horses stood on two sides of the cemetery between the thills of top-buggies, carts, democrats, two- and three-seated carriages and lumber wag-

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ons. They rubbed the bridges of their noses against the horizontal poles and fence-posts. About fifty people stood on the virgin sod. Most of the graves were marked off from it only by headstone and footstone, some not at all; and men and women who waited restlessly for the service to commence looked at their feet in order not to trespass on the graves. The recent monuments, like that in front of the open grave, were of blue and liver-pink granite, artificially rough-hewn, with a polished surface for the inscription. The older memorials were plain white tablets with a carved lamb or book or willow or hand or chalice, under which appeared the necessary information, often obliterated by green lichens or dead lichens smeared by the rain. Here and there a spindling structure rose higher than the head, miniature turrets and cornices topped by an urn like an empty helmet, neatly inscribed with the names of a whole family of the dead.

The springing grass was moist and livid. Around the roots were large drops of dew, but the blades were dry. Lilies of the valley had begun to flower, the spikes rising exact and slim, hung with little bells of wax curled at the edges. Many plants were crushed under thick shoes or canvas slippers daubed with a kind of whitewash.

The crowd backed awkwardly away from the gate in two lines as the corpse entered in its colossal

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box. It was overlaid with wreaths and bouquets already withered. The bearers staggered across the wild garden, lifting the forward foot high and planting it with care in order not to trip in the tangled vegetation.

As they laboured pompously down the irregular aisles and deposited the casket in the rough box on some two-by-fours laid across the excavation, some women who had withdrawn to their own dead started back to the company. One had seated herself before a little stone which she regarded, her head on one side, with an expression of exhausted regret. Another, in whose black cotton gloves the knuckles were strangely swollen, stood up and wept, pressing a handkerchief to her mouth. As they returned they suppressed their personal grief. Their skirts hooked on the dead stalks; and they gathered them up in one hand and waded through the grass with stately, angular steps.

The shadows of some dying evergreens were outstretched on the sod like a pair of moulted feathers. Mike heard the talk in the shadows, a harsh murmur discreetly hushed. Some women held their arms in stiff crisscrosses over their belts. The doctor, Mrs. Bier's and Mrs. Strane's brother, couldn't come, they said; he had just had an operation. "Mr. Duncan was one of the oldest pioneers in the county," a woman declared with a rising inflection. Another replied, sighing, that the real old

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people were getting fewer every day; her mother was ninety-three, and a great deal of care. A sick man propped himself against a scurfy tree, his unnaturally soft eyes caught by the black and white clots of human figures.

The flowers were stacked on a mound of wet clay and gravel. The coffin was lowered into the excavation on two pieces of huge tape. No one spoke. Two men and a woman, moving closer, made a little swishing in the grass. The rough box grounded on the bottom of the grave. The gloves were dropped into the hole. The eyes of the two sisters seemed to swell; and some tears ran out on their cheeks.

Everyone was huddled around the grave. The fat minister fumbled in his coat-tails for a handkerchief, and dried his temples and blew his nose. The undertakers fell back.

"Dear sorrowing family, brethren and sisters," he cried, and paused. "We gather together about the gates of death. A dear one is going between them; they will close over his body and we shall see it no more. Not in anger hath the Lord taken him away, but in the inexorable justice of His mighty hand. And in inexorable justice we will be judged, with this our dear one, standing all together in great crowds on the sloping meadows over yonder."

Mike looked across the country. Grey stubble and ploughland and here and there patches of win-

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ter wheat filled the rectangular fields, up to the dead fringes of trees on the horizon. The intersecting roads marked a rude X on the land, of which two arms mounted hills and were broken off against the damp sky.

Reverend Seazer continued: "The death of this good man is a warning. He has little to fear at the last day." He swept his audience with his small, harsh eyes. "As for us," he said, "we are wandering sheep, a spotted flock. Many of us desecrate the Holy Sabbath with impudent laughter and indecent dancing. This is a day of corruption. Our young men are mere animals from whom every chaste woman should flee in terror, and our girls lead them on with indecent dresses and gestures. I tell you, my friends, the poison is in our flesh."

An old man in a milk-wagon urged his mare up the hill; a bamboo pole shook behind him like a warning finger in delirium. A baby began to whimper; its mother detached herself from the group, darted away, and stood in a far corner of the cemetery, tossing it in her arms.

The preacher shook one gigantic hand over the palm of the other, warming to his subject. "By the flesh," he shouted, "we are lost eternally. For though it dies and is given to the worms," turning his large flat fingers downward, "our souls must bear the burden of its transgressions through everlasting life." He clasped his hands in an enormous

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knot. "We must control ourselves. Our desires are a snare which causes us to degrade the spirit; we must mortify them. The lust of the eye, the pride of the hand, the hunger of the belly—who would lose his immortal soul for them? The time comes when they can please us no more. The wind of death parts the flesh from the bone, and the soul of the sinner is threshed to and fro, homeless, hopeless—frozen, and at the same time scorched with the fire of the furnace. God sent His Son sorrowing into the world to warn us while there was yet time, but the cavities of hell are full of such as we."

Mike watched his friends. Mrs. Bier and Mrs. Strane held up their heads, and seemed to look with an air of familiarity at the unseen destinies of which their pastor spoke. Jule's face was moody and full of discomfort, as if he were alone in the anticipation of some catastrophe. Rosalia wept, and clung to her mother. Dan bent his head; he was extremely pale, and bit his lips.

A sensation of pity took Mike by surprise. The adolescent boy would be hurt by this religion of sin; his new impulses would be crippled; he would be ashamed. He wanted to help and teach him. He glared across the grave at the fat man with frank hostility.

The minister's voice became crooning and tender; he stretched out his hands. "O brothers

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and sisters, repent, repent! Repent and sin no more! We are here together in memory of a good man, an old man without stain. His sorrowing family are not stricken with terror at the distance which already divides them from him; for they know that if they are blameless they will meet again beside the crystal sea.

“Which do you choose? The stench, the filth and blindness of the pit, or the celestial meadows? There are cooling streams, with apples of the Tree of Life falling on the banks, and the light streaming along the golden pavement from the sea of God. There are desolation and disease and decay of the soul with the body. Choose, men and women! For we all pass through the gate of death; and in my Father’s house are many mansions.”

He stepped back, brandishing his wet handkerchief. His hearers looked at one another awkwardly.

The quartet came forward. They shared two books, and cleared their throats. The tenor hummed a note; the other three formed a chord from it. The tenor and alto began:

“Though your sins—be-e as scar-let,  
They shall be as white as snow.”

Some women wept. The blond soprano with protuberant teeth flushed extremely. Rosalia had stopped crying, and stood slender and stiff beside

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her mother. She had dropped over her face a heavy veil; and through it Mike saw the outlines of her nose and lips. The soprano and bass came in vigorously:

“Though they be re-ed—like crimson,  
They shall be—  
as wool.”

The men and women huddled over the excavation with a kind of rapture. Somewhere an enormous hoof thumped the ground. The muffled sobs of a woman in a duster began, and ceased, and began again. The hymn ended with a heart-breaking cadence:

“He’ll forgive yo-our transgres-sions,  
And remem-ber them no more,  
And remem-ber them . . . no more . . .”

Reverend Seazer extricated from his coat-tails’ pocket a little worn leather book which had been banging against his calves. Soberly he read the prayers and texts appointed for the dead. “Dust to dust . . .” The small clods and pebbles rattled on the box. He prayed once more.

The red, wet eyes of the women of the family clung to the grave. Good-bye was repeated. The horses were untied; carriages, top-buggies, and wagons disappeared in four directions, spattering gouts of mud along the roads.

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Some stalks of grass which had been trodden under foot straightened with a jerk. Mike stayed with the sexton, an old man named Corlew, to fill the grave. They worked in silence. The grey-headed man paused often to stare with distaste at the sod buried by the clay, and fell savagely to work upon the great mound. "Flowers," he said. "What a place for flowers! Dead already."

Mike felt the sweat moisten his arm-pits, and run down the middle of his chest. Through his canvas shoes the soles of his feet caressed the clods and stones.

Over their heads, a man and team paused at the mouth of the gravel pits; the horses, with the nose of one on the throat of the other, looked enormous in the bending light. Where the horizon was broken a little, miles away, a rain-cloud lay quivering on a full hill-top. The words pleasure and oblivion came into his mind. He sighed; his eyelids fluttered shut.

Slowly the grave filled.

Why was there all this talk of fear and punishment? He was inexpressibly happy. The cloud on the hill fluttered its great wings. He looked at the old man with wonder, who straightened and stared at the point of his shovel, sighing heavily, his eyes as hard as if they were made of horn. The horses on the hill stirred; the wagon and man heaved into the sky and disappeared. Mike and

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old Corlew bent over the diminishing clay; they swung their shovels in two arcs curving apart.

Winter was over. Soon it would be the season to love a girl. The air would thicken a little about five, the roads would be dusty, there would be cinnamon roses in the grass. He pictured a girl knee-deep in something yellow, walking with a kind of drowsy smile.

This daydream seemed to make his affection for Dan very poignant. He thought with pity how they were teaching him that this was shameful, this beneath him, this smirch his mind, this spoil his hope; and that something remote, hard, and imaginary, almost unattainable, was as beautiful as crystal. The mystery of adolescence wakened in him a deep curiosity. He wished that Dan felt as he felt, shovelling the clay over his dead grandfather. Something curious and beautiful would happen; and again he did not understand his own thought.

A farmer led a cow up the Gardner hill; her hind feet, very far apart, scooped up the mud.

They stamped the earth into the grave.

Then Rosalia drove over the Gardner hill; she had come to take him home. He called out, "We'll be done in a minute." She tied the horse, and came into the graveyard.

She had been at school in Rockhill, and he had seldom seen her. She walked slowly over the sod, over the dead clumps full of little, bright green

## AROUND THE DEAD

shoots. He saw that her mouth was like her cousin's. She stooped gravely and picked a trillium.

Mike looked at her in astonishment. He loved her instantly. Rosalia was embarrassed at his gaze, and blushed without smiling. Old Corlew fixed on them his intelligent eyes.

The misery of the funeral was gone from her face, having heightened its pallor. Her light, braided hair clung like feathers to her head. She stood staring wistfully at her grandfather's grave.

They rounded the high mound of clay. Mike stacked the limp flowers upon it, and turned toward Rosalia. "Good-night, Mr. Corlew," they called back, pleased by the accidental harmony of their voices.

## 2. THE PURITAN IDYLL

**D**AN sat beside his mother in the kitchen peeling apples. He was happy to be alone with her in the warm house, and looked at her slim trunk, the straightness of her neck between the ears and shoulder-blades, her innocent mouth and great animated eyes. He tried to imagine how, as a man, he could be like her. Sometimes she glanced under the stove at a basket full of chickens, almost drowned by the rain—which had overflowed the gullies and slid in polished sheets over the rape-field—and put there to dry and get warm.

The rain poured, vertical and slow. The orchard trees, terraced one over the other, the hills above in violet ledges, and the flooded meadows and fringe of woods beyond the barns, were alternately revealed and obliterated as the atmosphere thickened here and there with water. The twigs set thickly with leaves did not vacillate, but each leaf, deflected from its spine like a tent, gave in to the weight of each drop, until it slid from the edge and fell through the air again. This produced over the orchard, the lawn, and the road bordered with elms and hazels, a sober vibration; and in the sky and

## THE PURITAN IDYLL

where the distant horizon was blotted out, another vibration, with the same rhythm; and amid them the trunks of some poplars gleamed like a row of columns, and extremely white pullets moved under the immense burdock leaves.

Dreamily she said, turning the shrunken, green and white fruit in her fingers, "I hope your father didn't start home from Beeler in this storm."

His comfort was intensified as he imagined his father hunched up on the seat of the lumber-wagon, folded in dirty horse-blankets but nevertheless wet to the skin, the cold water dripping from the end of his nose, the strong smell of harness-leather and wet horses, the puddles, the rivulets wriggling downward. "Where was father born?" he asked.

"In Janesville," she said. "Jeremiah Strane, his father, was a circuit rider." She told him the plain but romantic story.

The circuit rider was responsible to the Lord for a territory like a kingdom; some of his people were twenty miles apart, and he was perpetually on the road. He was a lean, thin-lipped man; Dan had seen a daguerreotype. He held meetings in school-houses, grocery stores, and private homes, teaching the pioneer that the wilderness was the Lord's, that whatever was cleared and planted in sin was stolen from His mighty heritage and would be revenged; and on this mission drove through the untouched forest still full of wolves, across which the savages

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moved in caravans—horses, dogs, women, children in baskets, and tent-poles. The bad roads, the drifts shoulder-deep, the wind full of bits of ice, diminished his vitality more than his zeal, and attacked by pneumonia in the dead of three successive winters, he died on the spare bed of one of his pioneers.

His wife had accompanied him to lead the singing. Therefore her child had been given to an aunt who had no children. After the circuit rider's death his wife had also taken refuge with this woman. Since they were poor, the boy had been obliged to go to work at sixteen. Raised as a farmer by his relatives, they had expected him to be a hired man; but he valued his independence, and had become a sheep-shearer. An old man who went about the country from flock to flock had taught him, and for several years he had served as his helper, and when he died, kept most of his work.

He came, one May, to shear Mr. Duncan's flock of a hundred and twenty-five ewes. In the yard Theodora fed the hens, scattering oats in loose handfuls. From the animated fowls she raised her eyes as a buggy wheeled in from the road, drawn by a raw-boned horse which stopped abruptly. Her hand paused in the air; the grain sifted in a heap to the ground; her eyes met the eyes of a young man.

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He bent a little toward the wheel; he too was silent for a long time. "I am the sheep-shearer," he said.

Dan heard the eaves-troughs overflow and splash on the meagre grass, leaving the roots naked. His mother looked at him as if she begged him to understand more than she said.

"I think he loved me then. I called your grandfather, and they began to work."

The story filled the boy with an inexplicable sadness; but he listened keenly, transforming her flat sentences into scenes. He knew the old barn, had seen his father work, had helped him, might have learned the trade; and he heard more clearly than she spoke.

Mr. Duncan and the extremely dark young man drove the sheep from the pasture into the narrow barn-yard, separated five or six, and drove them into an extemporized stall of gates in one corner of the barn floor. Mr. Duncan had swept it with an old broom, and set up a table of new boards on which to form the bats. The sheep in the barn bleated to those in the yard. Their bleak noses and metallic eyes thrust out of the hoods of wool, which also covered their bodies in thick pads with parallel crevices across the back.

The sheep-shearer swung his legs over the gate. The sheep, shrinking away, drummed on the floor with their feet, each throwing her neck over an-

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other's back. He straddled one, grasped her forelegs above the knee, and threw her upon her rump. She stretched out her face, and beat her hindlegs in the air, but could not get away. By bunting her back with his knee, and at the same time pulling up on the forelegs, he was able to move her easily and quickly to a swept circle on the splintery planks of which the barn-floor was made. He worked with a secretive smile; and the ewe sat between his bent knees on her haunches, at his mercy.

Dan's young father (not yet father) elbowed the neck toward his armpit, stuck his shears into the wool as if to slit the gullet, and clipped downward. His spread knees clamped the body. In paralysed peace through the gate the sister sheep projected their noses.

Mr. Duncan half sat, half leaned in a hollow of the bank of hay in the mow, seeking and rolling the rare heads of timothy in his palms, while the first ewe was clipped.

In a little crescent window cut in the point of the gable, sparrows darted and vanished, chirping. On a dim shelf a female pigeon vomited down the throats of her young; others swelled and chanted amorously. The air in the barn was redolent of the dust of dead grass, of mud, and scaly weeds, and stale flowers, of mice and hens. A feeble radiance striped it from cracks in the wall, into which

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motes of dust, sharp and mineral, ascended, sank and ascended.

Outside, the lofty and pallid sky, and pools pricked with stubble, and puddles full of velvety sediment, and a lonely bird going up, and the violets in clearly cut purple on the round leaves. The light fell pliantly, tinged with pale colours. The compact, pearly grit of the roads shimmered. A green beard of wheat sprung on many fields. A woman in a blue cotton jumper hallooed. An ivory rooster printed the mud with his starlike feet, murmuring to his hens. The light rounded over the stone-grey barn.

The shearer clipped down where the wool was thin over the belly, folded back the matted fabric, and cut between the skin and the two lapels thus formed, widening them quickly. When he came to the legs he slit open the bedraggled fringes, and as if he were skinning it, freed a tapering limb of wool. Where the ankle was hung with lumps of dung as large as birds' eggs, the shears made a brittle click. The wool, solid like a hide, began to separate from the ewe's body, and at last was attached only to her sharp back, from which it hung limply. Then he twisted about, pressed the head and forefeet in the crook of his arm, and worked downward along the spine. The wool, on one side grey with dirt, and yellowish on the other like the inner skin

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of an orange, sank in a soft heap on the floor. He straightened up and stepped indifferently away. The sheep staggered a moment in her semi-human position, and fell forward on her feet; the pointed hoofs struck the floor; the ankles crumpled forward and straightened; she kicked out her hind legs nimbly, and stalked helplessly forward. Her yellow, emaciated body, planed and pitted by the shears, looked raw and unfinished between the wedge-shaped head and the bony grey feet. She stumbled, and nodded her head sickly. The two men, moving forward, herded her toward the stall. On the floor, dented and crushed into splinters by the feet of the horses which had been driven in with loads of hay or grain, the fleece lay bright, warm, and limp like a skin.

The shearer caught another ewe, and shifted her jerkily to the swept circle.

The sunlight clung to Theodora's blond hair as she stepped through the door with lunch on a black tin tray. She set down the tray on a feed-box, and stood by the man at work, glancing pitifully at the sheep. He looked up sharply, and stooped again over the upright paunch, the stiff legs and empty face, the ears drooping to hear the shears' ominous click. The ewe was allowed to stagger to her feet; the dark young man stretched his cramped muscles; and both the men ate. The thick bread with a glossy crust, the chunks of cheese, the thin coffee

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and cookies were eaten without ceremony. When the shearer's bright eyes met the girl's eyes, they became soft and sad. Then she returned to the house, swinging the tray.

Dan's grandfather Duncan made the bat, biting his moustache, and hissing softly through his teeth. On the table of planks laid across barrels there was a wooden box, blackened by the tallow in the wool. The four sides, with two sharp notches at each edge, were attached with hinges to the bottom, so that it lay flat on the table; and cord was drawn from notch to notch in a cross. He lifted the fleece carefully in his arms, and laid it on the box, outer side up, and bunched it in a compact mass, straightening and turning down parted locks which showed the yellow inner surface. Then he folded in the edges, folded the fleece over and in from all sides, and brought up the sides of the box and hooked them, and packed the springy wool down with his fists, and finally brought two ends of string through two loops and made a knot. Then he unhooked the box, took out the damp, bright bundle, laid it in its place on the growing pile, and sat down on a dry-goods box to wait for another fleece.

The animals, leaning against one another, continued to bleat. From the barn-yard the others, standing in the mud, replied in loud, bewildered tones. Their odour blended with the aromatic hay in a heavy atmosphere; and occasionally the breeze,

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streaming through the door, dissipated the bitter fragrance.

Now all the sheep in the stall were shorn. A crate was pulled back; they stepped timidly forward, peered suspiciously at the floor, and flocked into the wide, sunlit yard. There the hens scratched in the gravel; and their thin, clean fleeces shone with strange brilliance; and they were hurried across the open space, and a gate having been swung back, were left in a pasture, where all their heads deflected in a single movement; and they began to crop mechanically the cool, palpitating grass. In the barn-yard the men separated another company of ewes to be clipped.

So Dan had seen the shearing repeatedly; so it had been. Now the storm trembled violently about the house—mid-spring with its wet dimness, and anchored leafage, and springing grain, and gardens shrouded and overborn as the rain fell; and his mother's voice rose and fell liquidly, seeming to mourn the risk and pain of life, of his life, as she described the security and perfection of her own. The rain whipped the windows, not lessening their comfort; but somewhere in it, perhaps, were his father and the horses, beaten by the cold drops as the panes of glass were beaten, moving stubbornly over the roads, but slow and harried. The storm made of the late morning a false twilight; the fire glowed abnormally through the cracks of the stove.

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His glances moved intimately over his mother's face—her large blue eyes, her pale rounded brow under the folds of her hair, her small nose curved to a vague point, her drooping lips, like his aunt Selma's lips but softer and not so thin; and roamed downward upon the light, rigid throat, the slender body in the blue gingham dress, and angular arms with blue veins on the wrists.

She continued to talk, her voice at once high and soft. That night after dinner John Strane disappeared; her father nodded over a book; and when she had cleared the table, she remembered the clothes still hanging on the line, took a basket, and went outdoors. Beyond a space of lawn the sheets and table-cloths and clothes sagged and shifted with a fiery pallor and a soft, winglike sound. She began to take them down, dropping the pins in the basket, and saw his dark figure on the porch just as it rose and approached her.

“May I help you, Miss Theodora?” he asked.

They would have said little; Dan knew their balanced sobriety with its heavy undertone of feeling. The man carried in the heaped basket. On the porch he paused, breathing a little audibly, for her to open the door; and they faced one another. The colour went out of his face. The girl was frightened by his excitement, which seemed somehow connected with their presence together in the dark.

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"I think your father was frightened," Dan's mother said.

"Why, mother?"

"He felt physical passions unworthy of him, and still more of me."

In the dim kerosene light Dan's father had looked shrunken and sick. He stared miserably at her father, asleep over his book. Then he put down the basket, and left her.

Dan could imagine this part of his father's courtship, though his discomfort and sadness increased. The rain and driven air mourned without pause, overwhelming the weak leaves.

"He came back in the evening to visit us from the farms that were near," his mother continued. "But he went farther and farther away."

Dan thought excitedly of his father separated from her by miles of country, cultivated but still savage—neglected grain full of little animals, solitary roads, dense bluish forests, abrupt valleys smelling like cellars. But his mother had not paused.

"In that year I saw him only once, at a box-party. I thought that we belonged together in some way, God would guide us. After a while it was hard to get any comfort out of what I could remember. I prayed."

The next April he returned to shear the sheep. They stood by the water-trough in the dark. He had come late, and they were watering his horse;

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she carried a lantern. The sweaty animal was close beside them. He took her hand then and kissed her. Dan's mother said that what had gone before had been almost all pain, a coldness, a terror, and a hollowness, crowned by that tender kiss. He told her that he loved her and wanted to marry her. The girl wept without moving.

In spite of her calm, almost formal sentences, as his parents in the story were drawn together, Dan felt an overwhelming disquiet and baffling sorrow. The imagination which had added to the bare narrative his own memories and made him almost a sharer in the youth of his parents, grew faint, leaving him shut out. Now he had only his mother's simple words, the inscrutable facts—in relation to which he was weak, and ignorant, and inexplicably ashamed; these facts were love; and his response was a series of inarticulate questions.

"At first I couldn't tell your grandfather. Your father wrote many letters. We became engaged in the fall. The next spring he came back, to shear our sheep . . . and to marry me," she added after a slight pause; and then she laughed for the first time that afternoon.

Her laughter, an echo of her happiness, fell coldly upon his mind, though he moved his lips in a smile. He heard that the spring had been late and wet; they had been married in the Rockhill Methodist Church, trimmed with leaves; they had

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not gone away, and his father had begun immediately to clip the sheep. Did his mother sit on the barn-floor, her dilated eyes upon him—crouching, bending and almost breaking the prostrate ewes, smiling queerly? The boy thought how the night came down swiftly but smoothly, as if it moved in a groove. Beyond a kiss, his imagination could not go; there was only a feverish gloom. What took place in it? Did they eat impatiently together in the lamplight raining out over the table? And then? Did they go up alone for the first time to a single room? Did the night press at the window, did his father hurriedly draw the shade? Did they undress in the half lit and half shadowed room (Dan had never seen a mature body of either sex) and face each other? In his mind a darkness engulfed the room, and his mother was delivered into his father's hand like a sacrifice. He remembered the sheep, too early shorn, bleating in the cold wind. Their shrill, hopeless cries rose and fell, sometimes like solitary bells, again in torment, heaping to a climax and dying; he thought of these sounds mingling with the whispers of love—his lips almost within her ear. Dan sat very still, paralysed by the tumult in his mind. His emotion clarified swiftly; the heart of it was horror of his father and fear for his mother; and then it was hard to realise that all this was years ago, more years than he had

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been alive, that his mother sat beside him, her girl's face only a little faded, and smiling.

She turned toward him, putting out her hands, tears filling her eyes. "Oh, my son," she said, "if only you will have the strength to keep yourself true and pure! Your father and I were unspoiled, we had never loved anyone else. Chastity is the secret of our strength and our happiness. My son, I want all that is best in life for you, all that is most perfect."

She paused, and put her hands on his knee, and bent forward, her eyes proud though afraid, and full of yearning, peering into his face. He thought he was going to cry, and stiffened against it, fixing his eyes on the water gushing down, the harassed leaves, the throbbing sky.

"Many men," she continued, "waste carelessly in pleasure this precious mystery which God has given us as an image of His tenderness and to bring into being the children of His race. When great love comes to them, if it ever does, the bloom is gone; their senses are spoiled, their bodies, the temples of the spirit, unclean and weak. I cannot bear to think that my son should be such a one. O Dan, be vigilant! Ask God for help. One day you will find a sweetheart, the only one for you, your true mate. I pray constantly that you may come to her with a clean body and a pure mind."

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He felt as if he had taken a vow whose meaning he did not know. Her pressure upon him was strong and close, and she bent the sprout before it knew how to grow, moulded the green fruit in her hands. She had asked this pledge often, never before so formally; and that day in the storm it was linked intimately with the knowledge he craved and was denied. His love for his mother made him want, above all, to live her life of purity. But his imagination was sensuous; nothing lived in it but memories of movement and fragrance, sensation and colour; and all the future of which these memories gave him no idea was a chaos, from which he shrank in fear. He was not yet physically passionate; something had arrested the ripening of his appetites, which were still, at fifteen, hesitant and ephemeral. In his infancy he had begun to see that love was the secret of life; and his adolescence was the swelling of that cloud, from a mere shadow on the horizon, till the sky was filled with heavy thunderheads, sapping the air, and pressing intolerably on the pale, miserable boy; and his desire for knowledge became a miniature lust, also fierce and poignant, also tinged with self-pity and homesickness for death.

As his experience continued to defeat his curiosity, he began to suspect hidden brutality. Everywhere he heard a mingled sobbing and voluptuous laughter. The flowers, plundered by the bees; the animals, stately and foul; muscular, bearded men;

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women pliable and secret; children being born sporadically, painfully, like a punishment—they made up the tangible world. It was intolerably unlike his dreams. He cried frequently, and often wandered away into the hills, or lingered by the pools in the swamp, to forget the shameful tears, to forget existence itself.

This was the dawn of his maturity. He was quite alone in it. He had never had intimates at school. The other boys were coarse and dirty; they were almost all Germans, and spoke a low dialect. His careful, polite speech seemed an affectation; and they made fun of him. At the first signs of isolation in his childhood, he had taken refuge in his books; and they steadily completed the isolation. Tractable, facile in his studies, he became the favourite of successive teachers; all women, the unhappy boy aroused their maternal sympathy; this made him still more disliked. Without natural exuberance, he played with his schoolmates too little to make friends. Physically weak, he seemed made for persecution; but his moral courage and their fear of the teachers protected him. One day he had gone into the woodshed during recess, having noticed the emptiness of the playground; and all the little boys were there in a compact circle facing the centre—an impenetrable mass of little backs, rigid with interest in something unseen. A few hostile and alarmed glances were turned toward him,

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and one cynical grin on the face of a mere child, younger than he; and he went out, with a cold sensation in his chest. This was a symbol of all his school-days.

His father was a stranger—his mother's husband, his harsh critic, and his master. Dan mistrusted him, and thought him unimaginative and coarse, of commoner clay than his mother and he. John Strane had wanted a son like himself, to work with him, to hunt and fish. Instead he had fathered this moody, indolent creature—like a girl, he thought—clinging to his mother, sarcastic and sensitive, a bundle of nerves; and his mournful resentment grew. He could not punish him; once, when Dan was seven, he had whipped him, and never forgot the indifference and hate in the small blue eyes, or the malice of his explanations to his mother. He brooded upon the situation—a father and yet childless—prayed for another son, and none came; but the tenderness of his wife and their unsleeping passion saved him from bitterness.

Now the girlish boy was becoming a man; his voice had begun to change, from treble to bass. Tirelessly, his wistful eyes sought a friend, a confidant, an instructor, someone, anyone to initiate him into manhood. Then his attitude toward his father softened; inarticulately, the boy appealed to the man for help. "If he told me, if he showed me . . ." But the rift was deep. The father, to

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quiet his regret, had averted his attention wholly from his son, and gave his love to his wife, his fields, and his herds.

The animals in their nuptials offered the only clue. Dan waited, and watched stealthily, and was unsatisfied. A lank rooster muttered to his hens. Then he would choose one, and plunge after her, with hostile plumes thrust out. Day after day, she would run wildly from him, as if in fear of torture; day after day, be overtaken.

Solitary all day, before a dim window in the stable, the great bull was chained, nosing and munching his fodder, and clinking his chains as he moved, with an air of expectancy.

There were the dogs, repulsively bold and gay, and the cats screaming in the night, sinewy shadows of torment and rage outside his window.

His father also kept pedigreed hogs; and the neighbours' sows were brought to his boar in their season. He paced in a narrow yard, champing his saliva into dirty foam around his tusks. The sows descended from the high wagons on a rack like a staircase with cleats for steps, and ascended later. Nearby, in the garden or the corn-crib, Dan watched the men and animals with mixed curiosity and revulsion; but they always went into the dim, stinking building, out of consideration for the women. In his father and the farmers who came, an embar-

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rassed sobriety alternated with shouts and laughter; the boy listened gloomily and with hostility, thinking it now cynical, now obscene.

So he filled the darkness of his father's and mother's marriage, and the even more ominous darkness of his future, with monstrous forms and brutal motions.

He loathed the animal world, but knew himself a part of it, or about to become part—begotten by it, its child. For the traits of beasts were also in men: their horny hands, impregnated with filth, the crouch of labourers over a plate of meat, their arrogant stride before girls, their hoarse voices; and the beast seemed to the boy enthroned in the darkness into which men and women disappeared together. He had absorbed unwittingly his father's conviction that he was less than a man—not yet a man, or perhaps never; and his yearning to perfect himself brought him constantly to the border of that brutal kingdom, the realm of grown men, bullying their animals, luring their women. What awaited him, beyond the shadow line? The years propelled him, a mechanical tide, toward what he neither knew nor desired; and if he had been able, he would have turned back, farther and farther back, to infancy or death.

There was his mother to welcome him, when he had escaped from life: the mother breasts, eternally warm and sweet—nourishment unshared and never

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fought for; there was sleep within a globe of tenderness; he was a child again, lord of a solitary realm, to dream and never wake. This yearning rose again and again, making him feel faint and weary; and often in the twilight, as he sat at the piano playing the hymns his mother loved, the tears ran down his cheeks, and once dripped on the keys. But his weeping grew bitter when he thought that she, his only friend, thrust him forth,—perhaps unconsciously, but firmly—toward that hard, intolerable reality. She who spoke of “a sweetheart, the only one for you, your true mate”—did she not also desert him, did she not help to drive him out of the safety of childhood? The paroxysm of self-pity and fear passed; and the boy turned again to his mother’s puritanism—that mysterious dream, that architecture of chastity, towers and parapets of ivory and crystal (“your body is a temple”). He would be pure. Was it not also an escape from the carnal and the animal—from force, coarseness, and lust? But the two realms were linked, like his father and mother; and the link was in the dark.

### 3. SUMMER CONVERSATIONS

**L**IKE the breaking of a dream, spring vanished. The pearl air, and the moisture and melancholy richness, and corollas of wet wax, and tart aromas, and the languorous dew, and dusk falling all afternoon, and the mist—their season was over. Disappearing, they uncovered a bright land in rectangles of graduated green, with trees immobile in straight lines like fountains of vegetation. Meadows of small flowers in flat colours—mullein, mustard, blueweed, milkweed, and sweet clover; crowds of bees, glistening and mechanical. It was June, the morning month, trodden by bronze cattle, horses of mahogany. Slowly the eminent, poised sun arose, and sank deliberately.

Dan paused on the hill above his home. The collie puppy ran over the turf studded with balls of milky stone. The slow cattle began to browse, with a muted sound of the severing of the grass. He leaned against the trunk of an old hawthorn, rubbed smooth, year after year, by the herds. There was a gap in the other hills in the east, never cleared of mist in spring. Now it lay open, an aisle through interlaced groves. The other valley

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was illuminated: barns and houses, pink, white, and carnation, each in a crown of radiance; pallid roads thinning out; meadow larks spilling notes in the intervening air.

This was an interlude between dawn and noon, between spring and summer. The haze of pollen and the vapours had vanished; the heat loaded with fruit-odours, the emanations of grain, the brick-red light of summer had not yet come. From the height the boy looked down, discontentedly, but with a certain relief, thinking, "The magic is gone." But in the north the marsh lay, again distinct and ominous, more contrasted than in spring, when its tangled anarchy, the effect of its prodigious swales and pools, its subtle sadness, its malignity, were spread over the land. His melancholy lightened in the stillness which settled around him from the sky, like an inverted shell sustained by the young elms, poplars, oaks, maples, and wild plums. He thought of his grandfather's funeral, and his uncle Jule's strange hired man. Wondering if they would be friends, he drove the cattle along the crest and down the slopes, trying to keep the young dog at their heels, and hearing from the barn his father calling, "Co' boss, co' boss!"

One morning he stood with his cousin in his aunt Selma's garden. The great blades of the new windmill revolved, hissing in the indolent wind. The

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notes of china and glass striking together, as his aunt rearranged her china-closet, sounded from the house.

Toward the pond the garden was bounded by a raspberry hedge, by bright stalks and harsh leaves. Then the vegetables: cabbages, parsley sprigs, beet-tops in savage bouquets evenly spaced, carrots with emerald tops and orange roots, and vague strips of loam. They stood where the flowers grew.

The beautiful girl crouched before a white rose, her dress lifted above her ankles. Over the polished stem of green wood, the painted thorns, the notched, glossy foliage—the miraculous blossom floated, porcelain-white. The fragrance flowed upward to her face, cool and languid. In the interstices of the leaves fragments of shadow clung. The stem trembled, the rose shivered. The rays of light seemed to bend from the flower; they fell in an arch around it, and left the rose in a little chapel of translucent shadow.

Rosalia's eyebrows were frail and exact, like the arc of the edge of a petal. The iris of her eyes was formed of filaments of blue on a blue ground. Her nostrils thinned to an ethereal whiteness. Her equal lips had an air of solitude, a wistfulness or very shadowy mirth. Where her pale skin vanished under her dress, the whiteness whitened; and every motion diffused through it the ghost of a tint. She

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moved with a grace almost sinister. The boy was proud of her loveliness.

Some bright, mournful notes, clearly whistled, made them turn their heads, as Mike came up from the barn. Plainly the morning, or the whole world, pleased him. Between his lips, indolently smiling, the sunlight glistened on his small teeth; and on his freckled skin it burned lightly. There was a certain languor in the motions of his muscular legs in the faded khaki trousers. Between his long brown fingers he twirled a rooster feather. Curiously avid, his eyes shifted from the rose to the girl, from the girl to the boy. Rosalia stood up.

When he spoke his Adam's apple rose and fell between two brown tendons of his throat. "So you're coming with me to mow the cemetery. Fine," he said.

They strolled to the stable. Dan rolled out the buggy, and put in the scythe, the bushel basket, the rake, and the whetstone. Mike led the young sorrel gelding, already harnessed, between the thills; and they hitched him up. Rosalia watched them with veiled eyes. Mike put his foot on the hub of the wheel and swung into the seat, taking up the reins. Dan followed. Mike touched the horse's back with the knotted cord at the end of the whip; they wheeled into the road. Rosalia raised her fingers in a gesture of good-bye, and went over the lawn dreamily to the house.

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Up the steep, small hills the boys drove, and descended into valleys shrouded with trees but nevertheless bright, clattering lightly over the loose stones, lifting the dust in short puffs which folded back on the road. Mike whistled again.

“What is that you’re whistling?”

“An opera. An opera about a queen’s adultery. I heard it in Chicago.”

The disturbance of the one word in the boy’s mind was fleeting. He was happy. Mike knew everything, and in time he would tell him.

They tethered the young horse at the fence, and carried the cumbersome implements through the gate. The grass, matted on the soil and thinning out into tufts and tongue-shaped leaves and blossoms, was higher than their ankles. Mike whetted the scythe, rubbing the stone outward on the blade, and started to mow. All the severed plants slid to the end of the blade in a loose bouquet, and fell; and in his arms it swung back like a languid pendulum, and the point plunged into the miniature forest of stems, and swept through with a sharp sigh; and the grass gathered again in a cluster, and broke apart as a figure in a kaleidoscope breaks. Dan collected the hay with his wooden rake, and carried the piles in the basket to a large pile in a shallow hollow where there were no graves. The mowed space widened from the gate. Around the plaques of soiled marble and crude granite blocks, lest he

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blunt his scythe, Mike left a fringe of plants—the tall, pliable spears, the smooth or serrated leaves swaying upon and shadowing the stone. Everywhere were flowering plants, gradually growing wild: apple-shaped dahlias and snowballs, peonies with large bursting buds, cinnamon roses, geranium, and phlox. Mike was careful not to cut them.

In an almost vacant corner, they came to a grave. Dan had never noticed it. An elderberry, flowering thickly and loosing a perfume like an invisible powder, brooded over the stone. It was carved with a few plain, already dim letters: HANNAH MADOC 1869–1910 REST IN PEACE.

Mike put down his scythe, and dropped to his knees, and idly pulled the grass about a little bush of myrtle. “Did you know,” he said, “that this woman was your uncle’s mistress?”

Dan’s blood seemed to pause in his veins. His voice came muffled from his throat. “You mean . . . that he loved her?” He felt faint, and knelt on the grass by the headstone, trying to hide his emotion in curiosity. “But my aunt . . . When was this?”

“Mostly before his marriage, I guess. Though nobody seems to be very sure.”

Many observations, formerly meaningless, crowded into his mind: the formality of his mother’s attitude toward her brother-in-law, her curious air—aloof, superior, watchfully respectful; his aunt’s

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emphatic, almost defiant confidence and pride. Was his uncle bad? He seemed a stranger in the family, yet gentler and happier. Did everybody know? Did that make his family somehow cut off from the others? But people liked his uncle best; was that why? "Who was she? What was she like?"

"Oh, I don't know, except what's on the tip of everybody's tongue. A queer old woman, heavy, with bobbed hair. But she couldn't have been old always," Mike said dreamily, his eyes on the boy's face. "Once she tended bar at Boyle's—he was the saloon-keeper in Beeler before Klein—and then she went to Fond du Lac, and after a few years came back again with some money—nobody knows where she got it—and lived alone in what they call the Marsh House. I think the name of the people who live there now is Martin."

"What happened?" the boy asked, looking straight at Mike. He felt ashamed, and unwilling to be ashamed.

"Oh, I don't know. She lived there. I suppose your uncle went to see her, maybe not. At any rate, finally she died, fell out of a hay-mow and broke her hips."

The boy tore up some blades of grass in his fingers. "How horrible," he muttered at last, without conviction.

"Indeed it isn't," Mike said. "I think it's a fine

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story. It's too bad she was a dirty old woman in the end. But life is like that. Maybe that's why they always call her old—old Han, old Bad Han.”

He got up and began to work. Dan lingered beside him, and then quickly carried off the accumulated hay, running with the basket, and returned to lean on his rake, flushed and panting.

“Tell me then,” he asked, “don't you believe in chastity?”

Mike's eyes brightened at an opportunity to teach. “What a queer question! It has beauty. Before I went to the university I thought it was the only beautiful thing. To live in the spirit instead of the flesh. The flesh nothing but candle-wax under the flame. Then you feel that you're like Christ and all the saints. Puritanism appeals to the imagination, but it makes people sick.”

“Sick?” Dan echoed, confused.

“You see, there isn't anything but flesh.” He spoke slowly, in broken phrases, pronouncing the words with obvious pleasure. “We are all flesh; when it's weak, we're weak; when it's sick, we're sick; when it's dead, we're dead. Now we're civilized, we try to pretend that our bodies don't matter. But our minds, our imaginations, are flesh too, and part of the whole. Puritanism is like cutting a muscle in your arm, and trying to move your hand with its own muscles.”

“I don't understand very well,” Dan said.

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"Of course you don't," Mike answered. "I know a lot of long words, I've read books and heard men talk, but I'm not very clever. You'd better rake up some of this grass, or you'll never catch up."

Dan worked impatiently.

"Your religion is wrong," Mike went on, more steadily, as if he had been phrasing his thought meanwhile. "It cuts us in two. It divides the body from the spirit. The body is what we are, and the spirit what we think. Don't you see what that comes to? Hypocrisy, weakness, nerves. And the more reality contradicts their claims, the higher they push them, the vaguer and more cruel and more mocking they become."

"And it is only pleasure, your kind of love?" Dan asked wistfully.

"Only? Only pleasure?" Mike shouted, and his laughter turned quickly to an affectionate seriousness. "Listen, boy. It's built on despair. Once we thought life didn't matter, wasn't anything but a preparation for eternity; a vale of tears—with a sunny paradise, very strange and full of songs, all ready for the worthy. That's all over. We've found out we're only cells; they break up when we die. We've found out that we're animals, just animals that remember more and worry more. So life is the only thing that does matter. A few years, thirty or forty or fifty years, hungry years;

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then we end up here, under the grass; and we're going to have a good time."

Dan had read about Darwin and agnosticism; they had not seemed to concern him—a part of science, a dead theory. Now with a sense of something painfully, curiously opening within him, he wondered at his stupidity, never to have felt their personal impact. "And what is a good time?" He heard the envious tones in his voice, and felt that he had repeated this cry foolishly, involuntarily.

"That . . ." Mike paused, "that is a question." He spoke the words jubilantly. "Joy, delight, pleasure—there isn't any word." Mike stretched himself dreamily, crooking one elbow over his head, resting the other hand on the scythe-handle; and the great blade slowly turned over in the grass and pointed south. "Fun without any end. A bunch of flowers, falling, falling, over the eyes, over the mouth, till you're all still and satisfied. Love is our flower and women are the petals. Finally you're in love with everything. Life is like good bread when you're hungry, and you're always hungry."

Dan had never heard anyone talk like this. What he wanted to know seemed almost superficial beside Mike's enthusiasm. This was theory, but he needed anatomy. Again he felt so ashamed of his ignorance that he was ashamed to try to dis-

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pel it. "But so few people are happy," he said.

"They're afraid," Mike replied triumphantly. "They don't want to be. Low, animal, immoral, they think. In the cities it is worse. But here it's so fine and healthy; you have the privacy of the fields, twilight and moonlight. It's a place for men and girls, singing and dancing. It makes me mad to see anyone with a sour face or afraid."

The horse whinnied. The boy's heart beat steadily and heavily. "Why do people hide everything then, why won't they tell you about it?"

"You know what the old English writers called what men and women do together? The deed of darkness." He swung his scythe for a few swathes, and paused. "In the beginning the savages thought God was greedy and cruel like themselves; and shame was their way of worship. In the very beginning. We've inherited all that stuff and nonsense. So there we are, with our morals. Even our parents creep away into the dark like a couple of conspirators. It looks to me just plain crazy. In this lovely sunshine! Feel it, boy, feel it fall!" He ran his hand along his sunburned arm, and tightened his fists. "We breathe it, live on it. Why shouldn't we be like it, just one of the things it makes grow?" He laughed again. "What a preacher I am! Once, when I was sixteen, I thought I'd be one. Come on, let's eat our lunch."

Over the mound of moist grass and mown plants,

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some stalks bleeding where they had been cut, all slowly withering, a great hickory threw its image in many blots of shadow. Dan brought the little package and the jug from the buggy; and they threw themselves on the ground, half of their bodies on the sod, half on the wilting grass. Mike tore open the lunch; and they ate hungrily, pressing the sandwiches between forefinger and thumb, guarding each crumb of the cookies. They lifted the heavy jug over their heads and balanced it, so that the lukewarm stream ran slowly between their lips. Mike sighed in sheer contentment, clasped his hands behind his head, laid it back against the hay, crossed his legs, and idly swung one foot. "Now for a cigarette," he said.

The sun swung into the centre of the sky like a jewel. Along the horizon the heat quivered in a row of colourless flames. The bright stones, representing the dead, stood on irregular streets; innumerable insects hovered over the flowers.

Dan was silent, fighting his anxiety and pride. The struggle required all his courage. He swallowed twice, and spoke. "Mike."

"Go ahead."

"You know, I don't know a thing about sex. Will you tell me?"

"You poor kid!" He stared at the boy with surprise, amusement, and some pity; laid one hand on his knee. "Sure, I'd love to."

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Dan was strangely conscious of the silence in the cemetery, unaffected by the cries of a few birds, the breeze in the grass, a hammer tinkling far away on another metal; there were so many movements, of cattle drifting in pale flakes on a distant meadow, of a few melting clouds, of the light, of leaves—so many movements without sound; and suddenly he felt afraid that Mike would leave some shadow undispelled, some secret untold. "I don't know any more than a baby. I don't even know the difference between a man and a woman."

"Well, that's all right. I'll begin at the beginning."

Mike talked simply, and seemed to take pleasure in forming clear and romantic analogies. Dan's expectation of something loathsome faded swiftly away. He felt a kind of awe. The past was submerged under a flood of new knowledge, which seemed to him then less knowledge than beauty; and if here and there an ugly memory put up, he knew that it would vanish in its turn.

They got up, and finished their work, and drove back to Beeler, still talking; and Dan saddled old Darby, and rode home. He ate his dinner mechanically, half conscious that he had been hungry and was being satisfied. He looked at his parents with an altered curiosity, saying to himself that he did love his father. Then he kissed his mother, and saw an expression in her face which reminded him

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that his own face must have changed. A little dazed, he thought, Now I am a man, and went to join his father.

As he worked about the barns, his memory could not repeat what he had heard; but it was there, like a lens over his eyes, altering what he saw. A warm satisfaction took the place of exact thought or intense emotion—took the place also of the yearning, suspicion, and distrust which had filled his boyhood and seemed now mere childish travesties of feeling. Like the breaking of a nightmare into morning light, into familiar things, each with a well-known position and use, his morbid innocence had vanished.

He thought he would never forget that afternoon: the colour of the air, the postures of the trees, the harmony of the little sounds in the silence, the stones in the grass, the exact outline of the horizon which surrounded them like a painted scene, the appearance of his friend, the dissolving clouds of cigarette smoke, the red hair on his arms, shining as he tore and rolled some paper. Indifferent to what was around him, though no longer loathing it, he brooded not upon what Mike had said, but upon his own emotion. As he let in the cattle, he was startled by one cow which had strayed into the mangers and was walking up and down in them; and he turned his attention to his work with a vague sense that at last his loneliness and maladjustment were ending.

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The day passed—working mechanically, eating indifferently, sleeping deeply. The next morning was dim with rain, rain like a firm, accelerated mist. The numbness had gone from his memory, and he knew Mike's words—every description, every image. For the first time he felt a kind of fever, a foreshadowing of passion. In spite of it, he was not eager, did not enumerate the girls he knew, hunting among their faces, or so much as think of them. But his dread of growing up had been violent and long; now he yielded himself to the future willingly; and that act of his mind seemed to close his childhood behind him.

The next night he dreamed that he lay upon a cold wet bank, and a man that was both Mike and his uncle Jule talked to him, and suddenly became his mother; and she said, "Flee from the wrath to come;" and he woke unhappily, knowing it was not what the man had said, and he had forgotten something. But the clean, empty day was there; his father clanking the milk-cans down from the porch, and the sharp voices of the collies setting out after the cattle, and his clothes on the back of a chair, and Mike's words very clear in his mind, as if to reassure and protect him.

Because of shyness he might have avoided his new friend, but Mike found opportunities to see him, at once humorously and affectionately taking him for his pupil. One evening they were in his

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aunt Selma's garden, Mike smoking a last cigarette, Dan lingering before he walked home. There was golden glow with its massed heads of brass, and tiger-lilies metallic in the gloaming, and a bridal wreath like a miniature elm studded with medallions.

Mike stooped over the clump of bleeding-heart, over the tattered leaves and the curious bloom, varying from seedlike buds to ripe, red and pallid flowers. He took one of the hearts between his fingers, and held it close to his face in the attenuated light. "Funny flower," he said. "See how the red petal is looped up like a skirt over the little waxen legs."

Dan looked at the flower, and almost in awe, at his friend. Whatever he touched seemed to take on a disturbing significance, an almost abnormal beauty.

Mike puffed at his cigarette, and flicked away the ashes; and as the night deepened, the coal grew more brilliant and red. "I should think," he remarked, in his bantering, languid voice, "you'd have made love to your cousin."

Dan blushed.

"She is a great beauty, you know. She's like—I think she's like an Italian sculpture, an old one." He paused, and snapped a cluster from the bridal wreath. "Of course Italian women are all dark, but marble is blond."

"I'm not old enough, I suppose."

"I wonder. I wonder . . ."

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"Anyway, I think I'd not make love to my cousin."

"No . . . it wouldn't be a very good idea. But if I were you, I just couldn't help it."

Dan stared at the pallor along the horizon where there were some poplars like outspread nets.

"You'd better skip along home, boy," Mike said, grinding his cigarette under the ball of his foot, "and get a good night's rest. You'll need all your strength in the hayfield tomorrow, I'll bet."

One Sunday morning Dan said to his mother, "I'd like to go over to see Mike, and stay to dinner. May I?"

"Well, son, you know I don't like to have you miss Sunday school. Don't you think you see enough of him on week-days?"

His father turned away from the mirror at which he was shaving, and said, "Oh, mother, better let him go. It's a good thing he's found somebody at last that suits him."

"All right, Dan," his mother said, a little wistfully. The boy felt his father's implied criticism, but was grateful.

They lay in the haymow, for it had begun to rain softly. There was the sound of some pullets drumming with their beaks as they gathered up spilled grains from the floor, the whirr of a sparrow's wings as it swung like a small gray pinwheel from corner to corner, and other sparrows chattering and peep-

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ing about their frowzy nests. The rain fingered the roof softly. Mike searched in his pockets for his cigarettes, and put them away again, because of the danger of fire.

"Do you know," the boy said, "I used to wish I'd never grow up."

"You poor—little—idiot," Mike remarked mildly.

"Well, it all seemed so coarse and dull. Nothing but hard work and worry, and sex. Sometimes I would pray to die, so that I could go to heaven before I had done anything wrong."

"Forget it, forget it, forget it," Mike droned. "I tell you, life isn't like that, love isn't like that. You're too serious. That comes from religion; it's all tears."

A cow bellowed lonesomely below in the barn. The rain was not mournful as the spring rains had been, but fell without passion like a grey, liquid sunlight. "Lu-ra, lu-ra," a pigeon chanted, strutting along a beam.

"In fact, I think I'm getting mournful too," Mike laughed. "It's a shame, this time of the year, not to have a sweetheart. A man ought to walk out after work, in the evenings, with a girl on his arm. There ought to be a kiss or two, or more. . . ." The laugh faded, and his sharp face and large eyes filled with a mute pathos, like an animal's.

After a pause, he said, "You know, you probably

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weren't meant for a farmer. You won't have to stay here. One of these days you'll find out what you can do—writing, or business, or teaching, or farming. Lord knows it took me long enough to find out. First I thought I'd be a minister, and then a doctor, and then a newspaper man, and now a farmer. Maybe I don't know yet what I'm for. Sometimes I don't feel like a man, more like an animal. I'm so happy and so shiftless and so. . . . But you! You restless, unsatisfied fellows, you're the ones who do things!" His voice grew loud and eager. "Why, you could be a writer, or a painter, or anything. I should think you'd be happy. You're not an old man, you're a baby." He took Dan's hand and pressed it, and picked out an unbroken dried clover leaf, and laid it on the boy's palm, and closed the hand.

Dan listened idly, not knowing how these exciting possibilities affected his actual life; but they made him happy. "What are you going to do? Do you really want to be a farmer?"

"Don't know, worse luck. Just now, I like it better than anything." He began to chew a dry stem. "I'll stay here a while," he said vaguely. "I like your uncle, and Rosalia is beautiful. Then I suppose I'll wander along. . . . Do you know what I thought about you all when I saw you first?"

He spoke of the funeral—how wicked it was to

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preach about hell at an old man's grave; how stern and almost pitiless Dan's mother and his aunt had seemed; how he had wondered if Dan believed in all that terrible, bitter nonsense; how he had decided then to be his friend and tell him about love and morals and not to worry, but to be happy like an animal. "For we'll all die in the end. And it's not a judgment or a punishment—it's like planting a seed in the ground."

He spoke of the religion of the Greeks, and repeated some of their stories, at once joyous and mournful. To Dan, his talk had a dreamlike quality, a dimness and glamour; the boy believed in him with the ease and simplicity of a dream. His ideas seemed to be a religion, a religion of sensuality—opposite to his mother's; it roused his imagination in the same way, and seemed similarly visionary and remote from life, though Mike continually said that this was reality and Christianity a bodiless dream. But of the two religions, Mike's was the more alluring; for it wakened his sleeping senses as if with a caress; and their stirring, an almost imperceptible motion like the erection of leaves and the trembling among them of buds, gave the boy an obscure, sweet pleasure which he did not try to understand.

"People will not let themselves, or anybody else, be happy," Mike said. "They say that sex is a shame, an animal thing, a lust unworthy of the

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spirit of man." His voice turned to a dull monotone, as if this were the attendant shadow of bright, heedless passions. "In reality, sex is the design, the plan of everything."

The boy wanted to say, I don't know what that means; but he thought, Perhaps I will, for I shall remember every word. Someone ran up the muddy driveway; it was Rosalia. "Hush," Dan said, involuntarily alarmed. Mike laughed.

An apron over her head, a faint stain of pink from the exertion of running upon her cheeks, which were the same colour as the blanched, rain-softened air, the girl paused and threw back her head to look into the mow, loosening the blue apron with one hand so that it slipped down upon her shoulders.

Mike rolled over to the edge of the mow so that he could see her—not laughing, but the appearance of laughter on his face. "We're talking philosophy," he said gravely. "I just said that love was the design of life."

"Foolish boys," she said, laughing to hide her embarrassment. "Now, no more philosophy. Mother says dinner is ready."

Mike threw his legs over the bank of hay and slid down, and brushed the leaves and twigs of grass from his clothes, and running his hands through his hair, shook out other leaves. Dan

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swung down the ladder. They raced, laughing, to the house.

Another afternoon the boys drove to Rockhill together. They lay on some plump bags of grain which they were taking to the mill. Dan said, "Do you think there isn't anything at all that's wrong?"

Mike smiled. "Young man, there certainly is. There are a great many ways of doing harm. But if you love life and love people, instead of hating them, it isn't so hard to keep from hurting others. We've got to be good to each other, that's the main thing."

"For instance?"

"Well, suppose a man makes love to a girl. I call that good, not wrong. But suppose he gets her with child, then runs off and leaves her. That's pretty rotten. Do you see?"

These were their conversations. Dan cared for nothing that summer but these dialogues, and their reverberations in his thought, and the earth mingling with them its colours, forms and fragrance. In a few weeks his inner life had been transformed. He relinquished his mother as a memory to the child he was no longer, and relinquished his present mother to his father's love. Mike had been substituted for her; and he seemed then less a person than a symbol of all that he had not experienced.

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Like frost upon a pane of glass, puritanism had melted from his mind; and he looked out upon a glamorous reality, which was to be his life. But he had seen one faith break up in him, and disappear; was this another myth, another bright, plausible illusion?

He doubted, because doubt was instinctive, but believed because he needed to believe. A part of him was sad and skeptical, a sensibility recording incompatible details—faults, antipathies, and contrasts. The rest was plastic, eager for fervour and faith, easily ruled by the imaginations of others, his mother or Mike. Those who ruled him received his devotion.

The summer heat, once harsh and menacing, was now the breath of a friendly earth. The sky poured out upon the grain, the lawns and pastures, the plump trees, the rinds and pods, ripeness. Full-blown, the valleys throbbed. The glass-bearded wild barley rocked and waved. Milk-white and mustard flowers opened on the potato vines; bugs crawled over their broad leaves like moving jewels. Birds with ruddy feathers and sharp bills came out of the hearts of top-heavy trees to the shaggy edges, and embarked on the air.

In the brilliance little girls with yellow pigtailed jumped rope. The sound of the mowers disentangled itself from the innumerable soft stems, and

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quivered out over the land. Men came and went with rapt faces, their shirts blackened with sweat; great muscles shaped like a yoke gave their shoulders a strange magnificence. The corn was weeded; and its shiny ribbons rose and parted in two opposite arcs, shivering. The hay was cut, and raked into windrows, and piled in cocks, and covered with caps of white canvas, which gleamed at night in ghostly ranks.

One Saturday night it rained, leaving Sunday morning like a large yellow rose, cool and firm at the heart, leaf upon leaf of veined light, studded with great drops. The sun rose in a stately manner; the dew vanished. At noon the day like a yellow rose opened wide, folding the land in the rustle of its petals. Horses trotted crisply in the fine light—buckskin, dappled, roan, bay, and black—drawing carriages to and from church.

Mike, Dan, and Rosalia had planned a picnic. They were going to Lake Twelve for the afternoon, with their supper in baskets; and Jule was coming with them to fish. They loitered under the tall tree by the house. Mike was telling about a negro prayer-meeting he had seen. The darkies had clapped and swayed in a frenzy, moaning or crying Hosannah. Mike remembered some of their songs.

Jule came out on the porch. "I used to hear them singing sometimes in Fond du Lac," he said. "Look here, I think I'll not go. You youngsters

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will have a better time without an old man.”

“Oh, daddie,” Rosalia protested. “Don’t you feel well?”

“Feel well enough. But I guess I’ll be more comfortable in the shade with mother than sweating out there in a boat. Anyway, the fish wouldn’t bite. The lake’ll be like glass.”

Rosalia’s eyes shone with conflicting alarm and eagerness. Mike said, “Well, shall we go anyway, or give it up?”

“Of course, of course go,” Jule said. “Why not? Wasn’t my party, in the first place. Better take Nancy instead of Job. You’re in no hurry. She’ll pasture on a long rope. ’Cause Job might kick up his heels and leave you.”

As they turned into the road, Selma waved. “Be good children,” she called, at once playfully and sternly.

Mike and Dan each sat on one hip to make room between them for Rosalia. She sat up very straight, and sometimes her laughter was restrained by a prim formality.

They passed a cherry orchard. Above the forked, peeling trunks and the leaves in a polished crown, two stout women on ladders stood against the sky, picking the hard fruit in tin pails. They were suspended there like two black and white, marauding angels. The horse trotted down a slope; the canopy of the carriage trembled.

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They passed a family on a lawn. An old lady shifted a green parasol. A maple opened like another parasol. A child threw a stone; a dog raced, barking.

They passed silent houses and vivid gardens. Cattle raised their necks, as they passed, and resumed their cropping. Some colts galloped away. Hens sailed over the sandy road. The mare raised the dust with her fringed feet, and blew from her lips; and a faint spray touched their faces. Dan shrank; and Rosalia brushed it from her cheeks with a little lace-bordered handkerchief.

They passed the marsh. Rosalia stared into the florid waste—the grass thick as hair, the crude foliage, the flaring blossoms, the thick roots with fringes of little roots. It seemed to fascinate her.

All the way Mike, holding the reins idly in one hand, fixed his eyes on her, luminous with a kind of quiet laughter. When she looked up, they became very blue, and seemed to urge her to share his excitement. Dan watched them intently.

They came to a gate; Dan leaped over the wheel, opened it, and closed it behind them. The lane curved over a cropped meadow, and entered a dark wood—hazel, ironwood, juniper in circular crowns, fallen trunks, saplings, and seedlings, pennyroyal, mandrake, and deadly nightshade. In the dim light, vivid moss clung to stumps. A cluster of young maples with their broad leaves robbed their

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own bodies of light, and grew in a company of pallid lances, parallel and evenly spaced, around a great rock. It woke in the boy a memory of his childish books; and he imagined Mike and Rosalia walking in it, their bodies like the parallel trunks. They spoke no more; each seemed preoccupied by a curious emotion; and Dan felt that their drive had brought them nearer and nearer to some strange sweetness.

Through the trees there appeared a pale light; it was water. They drove into a small clearing and a falling, trembling blaze. Mike helped Rosalia out of the carriage; and they stood for a moment gazing at the green banks, the heavily wrought foliage, the water like a block of marble. Then the boys unhitched and tethered the mare; and Rosalia put their supper in the centre of a bush.

The soft breeze, bearing the vapour of the rain which had fallen, disguised the heat; but soon their temples throbbed; and they were glad to turn down a shady cow-path which ran along the shore.

They wandered all afternoon, finding mushrooms, and a bird's nest, and little balls of feathers, fur and bones under an owl's nest, and a fox's den—exchanging relevant and irrelevant memories, laughing. They sat in a row on a log, gazing across the empty lake. The deep sod overhung the water; and heavy trunks leaned outward. Some boughs drooped into it; one tree had sprinkled the surface

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with blighted, coin-shaped leaves. Where glassy blocks of light lay in the shadowed water, they could see small fish, almost invisible, like splinters of ice, and very clear and stately, sun-fish, or pumpkin seeds.

"This lake is supposed to be bottomless," Dan said.

"Bottomless? What does that mean?"

"An underground current to Red Lake, uncle Jule says."

"And the line is drawn away by it, and doesn't rest on the ground? Nobody has plumbed it very carefully, I'll bet," Mike said, with his mild, mocking grin.

"Oh no," Dan answered soberly. "A man drowned here once, ten or fifteen years ago, and they dredged for his body, and never found it."

Rosalia shivered.

They strolled away from the lake up a hill and over a stony meadow with more stones in bright piles. Mike's solicitude for the girl, his close, watchful accompaniment, the expression of his eyes, seemed to have a deliberate intent, a meaning more and more clearly revealed. "The sun is getting low," he said. "Let's go down and have our supper."

All the sculptured branches stirred in niches in the sky. Then they formed around the water a wall of watermelon green, the individual leaves and

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boughs piled exactly upon one another. A taint of darkness began to cling to the innumerable folds of the surface of the lake. The clamour of the water-birds resembled the voices of disturbed men at a distance, and the croaking of frogs broke out. One bird sailed from a tree, shaped like a dark boat dragging its oar, and dipped into shadow.

Dan gathered four round stones and some dry sticks, and made a fire. Rosalia opened the packages. Mike whittled slender branches into forks, and pressed the points of each into a link of sausage. The three friends stood around the fire. Through a portal of trees, tall pillars burdened with blocks of foliage, they could see the lake, blanched and palpitating. The twilight seemed to rock to sweet, inaudible airs. The three lay on the grass; and each one in silence let the others listen to music he did not hear, music which no one heard.

“What shall we talk about?” Mike asked. His voice ascended on a quivering note; and Dan thought it was like a speech in a play. “What I think would be clumsy in this loveliness,” moving his fingers through the air in a circle that included the water, the massed trees, the little amber places in the sky. “What are you thinking about, Rosalia?”

Rosalia sighed; and her sigh also was like a sigh in a play, before an invisible company on the grass. Dan felt himself to be a spectator, and watched the

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two others, half reclining, close together, with the firelight on their faces.

Mike spoke again as if he had been answered. "That is why there are poets. I remember some Spenser that I learned at school.

'With that, I saw two swans of goodly hue,  
Come softly swimming down along the Lee . . .  
So purely white they were,  
That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,  
Seemed foul to them, and bade his billows spare  
To wet their silken feathers, lest they might  
Soil their fair plumes with water not so fair . . .  
Against their bridal day, which was not long:  
Sweet Thames run softly, till I end my song.'

With the monotonous tones—echoing, falling into place—the notes of the birds and frogs and the sighing of the wind mingled.

"'Eftsoones the nymphs, which now had flowers their fill,  
Ran all in haste to see that silver brood,  
As they came floating on the crystal flood.  
Whom when they saw, they stood amazed still . . .'

"I have forgotten," Mike said, and he lifted Rosalia's arm and kissed her wrist.

It was as if a filmy curtain had fallen; and Dan, mysteriously impelled, got up and strolled away to the water's edge. He went into the dilapidated boat-house; and on the platform around the square

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pool, his feet made a dull reverberation. There was no boat. Heaped in a corner, he found a mouldy coat, a basket, and some magazines, souvenirs of other picnics. He opened a magazine, and held it to the light, and saw a picture of a man and a girl with vapid faces, close together on a tumbled couch. He could still read, "Will you never—" turning it carefully upward, as if to gather together the last fragments of light for this purpose—"forget me? Will you be true?" The girl's face reminded him of his mother. He tossed the magazine into the water, where it splashed softly.

He turned back toward the shrunken, pink fire, walking noiselessly up the meadow.

Rosalia leaned against a tree trunk; Mike's body was parallel with hers, and very close. Her eyes were shut; and her mouth made a little shadow on the faintly illuminated oval of her head. Below it was the back of Mike's head. One arm lay across her waist, and the hand was beneath her body. The arm tightened convulsively. He was kissing her throat.

The boy's heart stopped for a beat. A pang shot through him. Following it, there surged a tumultuous happiness. He was no longer shut out; life had opened and let him in. He trembled. Tears wet his eyelids.

He felt as he had sometimes felt in a dream, when one part of himself had discovered another part do-

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ing something of which he had been unconscious. He turned back, less anxious not to interrupt their love-making than not to interrupt his own emotion, which echoed it. He scarcely lifted his feet, muffling each step in the grass, and drew behind a clump of hazel. There he found himself within a ring of trees, thickets, and stones. The turf was very pale; and when he turned his eyes toward the sky, it too was pale and serene. He sat down on a stone. His mind was lost in a gentle throbbing. Then he remembered that love had only begun, revelation had only begun. He whistled softly, and after a moment walked toward them, still whistling.

Mike lay on his elbow, smiling. Rosalia stood by the fire, rousing the ashes with a stick. The flame, with no fresh wood to nourish it, had become a mere exhalation, beating softly against the air; but it cast a pale pinkness through her thin skirts, outlining her body.

"Time to go home, boy?" Mike called. He stood up, stretching his limbs.

The black trees closed behind them over the lake, a faint sheen still clinging in a film to its perfect, black and ghostly marble. They were silent; it was the same mood which had touched them time and again all afternoon; now it enclosed them, and took them for its own, into its shrouded heart and its pulse like a harmony of drums.

Beeler was bright, full of shrill or deep male

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voices. Near the dance-hall a group of men was shaken by laughter. They heard the loud, uncertain band, and the beating and shuffle like sandpaper of the dancing feet. On the smooth road they floated swiftly past, embodying all the implications of sweetness and pleasure, distinct from all the implications of pain, ignorance, and disaster. The stars began to stir, throwing off sparks with each movement.

The mare trotted heavily into the yard. Mike drew in the reins at the door of the summer-kitchen. Rosalia touched Dan's cheek with a kiss, steadied herself upon Mike's outstretched hand, and was gone, calling good-night.

As the boys unharnessed the mare, Mike looked at Dan with flickering eyes. He swung the harness upon its peg, and laid his unsteady hands on the boy's shoulders. Dan almost shrank from his unnaturally bright smile and the fierceness of his eyes.

"You're a good kid," Mike said huskily. His hands lifted and fell at his sides.

They lingered in the garden.

There they spoke softly, in order not to be heard through the windows, which deposited dim squares of light on the flowers and the grass. "Do you know what has happened? So wonderful—" Mike whispered. He raised his arm, and drew the boy to him.

Around them spread the uneven shadows, the

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blackened colours, the dishevelled magnificence of summer. The snow-ball dangled its numerous globes, already brown. Some peonies stretched out in the grass, exhausted by the great black buds, broken open and bending the stems.

"Your cousin loves me. She will give herself to me. I know she will." Even in the whispered words his exultation sounded sharply. His lips parted in an extremely reckless, drowsy smile.

"I saw," the boy said, "but I am glad you told me." Once more, the throbbing began in his throat. Refreshed, relieved, and with no loneliness, he felt Mike's arm relax.

#### 4. DELIGHT AND TEARS

**M**IKE slept. He thought that he lay on his back beneath a cloud, in a bed of leaves. Unquiet because of the heat, he rolled over and moved his arms.

He woke. His room was filled with moonlight. Sleepily he remembered his dream, and smiled at it. Then he thought, Who is that, for he was aware of footsteps, extremely slow, creaking on the stairs. He sat up in bed. He could not determine if they moved up or down. They ceased. He struck a match and looked at his watch; it was half past three. Could there be a thief in the house? Was someone ill? He got up and went into the hall. Silence; the large clock in the dining-room ticking sonorously. Quickly and cautiously, he went downstairs. The dining-room was empty. Milky moonlight entered. In the top of one window there was a weak star. He turned back into the hall. He heard a vague sound at the head of the stairs, and looked up.

A white figure stood there. It was a woman in her nightgown: Rosalia. Then she descended regularly and slowly, pausing upon each step. She

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did not put her hand on the railing. Slim and rhythmical, she came down, unreal and weightless. Her braided hair fell forward between her small breasts. Her bare arms caught a spray of moonlight.

“Rosalia,” he whispered loudly. “What is the matter?” she did not answer or seem to hear. He saw that she was asleep. She moved as if she would walk through him. He took her hands.

He leaned toward her then so that her hair brushed his face, and called in her ear, “Rosalia! Rosalia!” She pushed weakly against him and tried to free her hands. The contact with her sleeping body made him shiver. He shook her hands gently.

Then she woke. Her eyes focussed, and roamed bewildered about the dark hall, the window, the moonlit stairs, and fell at last on Mike’s face. “Mike! Where am I?”

“It’s all right—dear. You’ve been walking in your sleep.”

“Oh . . . I am sorry.” She drew back, and looked at him, in his short nightshirt, the clear brightness falling on his bare legs—and then looked down at her own clinging garment, through which even the moonlight could penetrate. She stiffened slightly, her eyelids dropped, and she blushed; and in the bluish light her blush was like a shadow.

Mike threw his arms about her, forcing her

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against him. After a faint, brief struggle she relaxed, clung to him, and let his mouth rest upon her mouth. The contours, almost imperceptibly shrouded, of their meeting bodies made Mike tremble. He breathed, "I love you."

She let him take her into the parlor. The warm draughts coiled about them and caressed them. He drew her down beside him on the sofa. Their kiss was scarcely interrupted by these dreamy movements. Here and there vaguely in the shadow the corner of a gilt frame or a vase glittered. Hungrily but as gently as possible, in order not to frighten her, his hands roved over the clear outlines, the incredible softness of her body.

"Do you really love me?" the girl whispered, her dilated eyes, seeming darker than they were, probing his eyes.

"Oh I do, I do. So much."

"Then you must let me go," she answered, with a break in her voice as if she were about to cry.

"No, no, never, I can't, you must stay with me, please."

"No, dear," she replied sadly. "It's wrong."

"It isn't, it isn't. So beautiful. It has been so long. I've never held you like this, never before. Please."

"It is wrong." She shivered. "If you love me, you won't want to hurt me. You will protect me.

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From your passion," she added, so softly that it scarcely seemed to have been said.

He could not think how to meet her objections. He felt very weak. She stood up, and drifted away swiftly across the room, whispering, "Good-night, dear."

He followed her up the stairs, clinging to her arms, and pushed open the door of his room, and whispered excitedly, "Come. Into my room. Just for a little while."

"No," she murmured with a rising inflection, slipped away from him, and vanished through another door.

Mike threw himself on his bed. His pulses were throbbing; he was shivering. These shivers of defeated longing mounted until they were almost shudders, and ceased, leaving him quieted. An ecstatic sensation streamed over him, now painfully sharp, now heavy and warm, now vanishing like a perfume. He could not still his tingling limbs. Inflamed and dark, passion sprang time and again. In this excited state, he fell asleep, and found his girl like a lily lying on an equally white hill-side, and when he put out his hands to touch her, he woke.

A moist clarity flooded the room. It showed the familiar objects—his body, the bare table, the photograph of his mother, the battered trunk, the

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yellow wall-paper, the stains on his shirt and overalls. There was an odour of dew. Somewhere a rooster like a little horn sounded *Kaka-lura-loo-oo*. Another echoed, far away. A quacking of large birds was borne clearly across the pond.

Mike lay, all his feverish craving assuaged, thinking how he would woo Rosalia. Was her immaturity so hard and impenetrable? Wouldn't she respond with plastic eagerness like Dan's? Wasn't she what Dan would be if he were a girl? Why was her will stronger than his? He blamed his own extreme excitement. His physical violence had threatened her, before her mood was ripe. He felt humble and wiser. Magnificent and faint, her loveliness rose up in his mind to dismay him. In the clinging cotton, adrift in the watery darkness like a spurt of moonlight.

The sun parted the trees with slim, searchlight rays. On innumerable boughs the birds loosed their faint, mercurial tones. Fowls left their roosts in avid companies. Now there was an incessant trumpeting, from farm to farm, of the small proud cocks.

At the breakfast table Rosalia moved and spoke with a veiled intensity. As if alarmed and fascinated, her eyes crept furtively to Mike. He observed her mother's scrutiny, and ignored her, talk to Jule.

The two women were strangely alike. Mike

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thought that they were aspects of the same spirit—Rosalia its grace, her mother its power; but he did not know exactly what the spirit was. It lay in their eyes, of which the lower lids were straight and the upper lids highly arched, in the drooping lips with their implications of solitude and scorn, in the thin, nervous nostrils. But over the mother's very pale forehead, and in the slightly brown depressions under her eyes, and in the sad mouth, an ironic shadow flickered, which had not appeared to haunt the girl's face. He connected that shadow with what he had heard of the woman called Bad Han. Had Selma lived amid threatening circumstances, which she alone knew, which she had forestalled? Such a life, he thought, would have moulded that intolerant, lonely face. As he discussed with Jule a coöperative cheese factory which had been established at Pine Lake, he wondered if these women loved an unearthly perfection which they were too fastidious to discover, too proud to relinquish. Did that illusory perfection, unseen and ceaselessly followed, cast back upon them a reflection of its beauty? For there was even about the mother, though ill and almost old, a kind of beauty, strict and courageous, troubled and distorted by disappointment.

She seemed to probe into the girl's mind. Would she be able to thwart his passion? She seemed to dislike and distrust him. Would Rosalia tell her

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what had happened? The mother said, "You are a little pale, Rosalia. Aren't you well?" Mike listened keenly.

With an air of indifference, she said, "No, mother." The languor of the words imitated a placidity which he knew she could not feel. The anxiety on her mother's face lightened. "I didn't sleep any too well. It was very hot." Mike resumed the conversation with Jule in which he was so little interested, in order not to betray, even to Rosalia, his excitement and his relief.

One afternoon about five they sat together on the porch. Rosalia was sewing, and Mike pretended to read. Her eyes rested repeatedly upon him, cold but curiously inflammable, turning away and coming circuitously back as if against her will, to his head, his restless hands, his idle body. He felt his power over her, and rejoiced. He said, "Are you really a Christian, Rosalia?"

She stared at him. "Of course," she replied, almost disdainfully.

Mike was embarrassed. "I mean," he went on, seeking the concise phrases which her beauty drove out of his mind, "do you believe in Hell and sin, do you really believe that life and love are evil?"

A flush climbed slowly up from her throat over her face, and her eyes darkened with a suggestion of fear or anger. "Life and love are perfect and noble; but they may be degraded. Degraded, they

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are worth very little. I don't think you know what Christianity is. It is a pity."

Mike shifted in his chair. Then he tried to tell her what he had told Dan. Over her face passed expressions of distrust, pity, and involuntary tenderness. She murmured, "I don't think that is true," or, "No, I think you are wrong."

Suddenly tears gathered in her eyes; and she cried, "Oh Mike, why do you try to disturb my faith? If you care for me, why don't you respect it, love it, learn what it means? Please understand," she implored.

Mike winced. His voice, when he spoke, was husky. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I am in love with you. So I thought . . . we would feel the same about things."

Rosalia gazed at him, her eyes heavy with vague meaning. "You are a queer boy," she said. "Why do you say such strange things? I am almost afraid to . . . to let you love me. Will you believe what I believe?" He dropped his eyes. The girl seemed to mistake his movement for assent; her face assumed a bright expression. "You wandering sheep!" The mingled mockery and exaltation in her voice were inexpressibly poignant. "I will bring you into the fold."

The afternoon waned into dusk. She fell into an enigmatic reverie. Was there any throbbing of passion, Mike wondered, in her pulses, any fire hid-

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den in her blond, cool grace? They sat in silence. The shadow of the porch turned blue. The young cattle paced to the well, and drank, and put their heavy heads over the gate; and their short horns glittered softly.

Mike was very happy, for he thought he detected, under her coldness, a current of desire, slowly, resistlessly forcing her to its destination. She loved him. That was her weakness and his strength; and it seemed strange that he should think of love as if it were a bitter conflict.

The summer grew more voluptuous. Amid the heavy beds of green, the stiff corn-tassels, the silk streaming from the milky ears, the pallor of the wheat in the bearded heads, the acrid shade, the herds hanging out their tongues, the panting fowls with wings outspread, the gloomy, dust-blackened men struggling with the crops—Rosalia was like an echo of the spring. Slim and blond, Mike saw her standing, with an appearance of weariness, against the heavy landscape. She seemed to brood upon, and always to reject its coarse, convulsive luxury—cold in its heat, pure in its impurity, rigid in its soft magnificence.

The harvest-apple trees shuddered under a load of fruit like lumps of glass. Yellow gum gathered on the cherry trunks in shiny clots; and huge drops of syrup collected on the stems of the plums.

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Sometimes immense clouds staggered over the hills, drenched and tangled the fields; and the sun sucked up the puddles swiftly. There came a time when there was no rain.

On the hottest afternoon of those dry weeks, some of their young cattle broke through the fence into the marsh. Mike went after them, walking up a lane, and through a grove, and across a meadow; and there he met Rosalia with her hands full of summer flowers. He said, "Don't you want to come with me? I'm going to the marsh to hunt our cattle."

She hesitated. "Yes . . . I will." They climbed over a gate and turned down an aisle of trees.

Above their heads the boughs interlaced. On the stumps the fungi grew in layers like overhanging roofs. Here and there the ground was tented with mandrakes; and in the dim crotches the may-apples hung and rotted. Where the ruddy light gushed down between the trees, blackberries massed their crude foliage, sprinkled with pink berries, swelling and slowly turning black. Where the tree-tops pressed tightly together, making an ash-coloured dusk, here and there a sunbeam curled up like a weak tendril. Mute, mottled birds leaped and sank. In a kettle beside the path the vegetation was piled chaotically—lanceolate, lobed, cleft, serrate, hand-shaped, featherlike leaves—those on

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which the sunlight fell like plates of green crystal, those below a series of reflections of the crystal, progressively faint and dark, down and down till in the hearts of the thickets there was a charnel twilight, where flesh-coloured mushrooms glimmered.

Rosalia's flowers wilted; and with an expression of regret, she threw them away. Blackberry thorns hooked into her dress; sometimes she had to remove the stalks, handling them warily, sometimes the limber branches sprang back of their own accord, and swung behind them. The path descended. The vegetation grew still more prodigal; stagnant odours rose. Over the infrequent flowers with scant petals and coarse calices, rarely visible insects issued their nasal tones. Slowly the normal woods gave way; the swamp in sinister magnificence reared round them.

An expression of fascination, almost of fear, crept into the girl's face. She moved closer to Mike, who peered among the trunks, and often paused to listen for the steers and heifers. Rosalia said, "I'm a little frightened."

"Really?" he echoed, curiously pleased. He put his arm about her waist; and they walked together. They parted to clamber over a log, and resumed the embrace.

A bird plunged into the heart of a tree, leaving for a moment an opening, where the leaves shivered

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heavily. The cry of another pierced the air. The road was steep. Mike watched his feet keeping time with Rosalia's small feet, dimly aware of some symbolism in its direction, pressing deeper and deeper into the dim, wet forest. At last they were at the level of the lake which had once filled the valley. Here the old ferns, pointed and rigid, put up innumerable; the young ferns uncurling were sticky and weak. The naked trunks reared out of shrouds of hairy roots. The grass was saw-edged, the crude sunlight distorted, the large insects very loud.

Mike glanced continually at Rosalia's blond head beside his shoulder, thinking that the clear pallor which burned on her face was the strangest of all beauties. He walked fast, pausing now and then to listen. He was afraid that the cattle had gone out on the marsh itself, where it would be hard to follow.

They came to a clearing. Over it hills towered, and upon them descended slabs of light in great stairways, with countless trunks standing like pillars. From it blunt bogs led down to the pools, opaque with slime, separated by wiry grasses and banks of caked mud. The hoods of the skunk-cabbages were dry. There were grottoes of trees, dead and swelling vegetation, the swales and sink-sands. The tamaracks opened here and there, so that the eye could wander out over the wilderness,

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lying, stirring convulsively in the mottled blaze.

On a little island of sod an old hawthorn stood; and its canopy of foliage inclined sharply on one side, almost sweeping the grass. The sunlight fell through its branches in soft splashes on the ground. There was an unnatural hush in the valley, which kept reminding Mike that they were alone, perhaps forgotten, never to be spied upon. Across the wooded distances they could hear the notes of a bird dripping into the hollow. If anyone had come, his footsteps would have warned them half a mile away.

"I wish I didn't have to go out on the marsh. Those wretched beasts are probably hidden in the shade somewhere, up to their knees in water. Let's sit down and rest. You'd better wait for me here anyway." They stooped under the low boughs of the hawthorn, and sank upon the grass.

Rosalia seemed to repel the heat and keep her cool freshness. Mike looked up, smiling, at her calm face. It would have seemed lifeless but for the elusive expressions drifting across it—a colourless kaleidoscope, never the same, never still, which took the place of pinkness in her cheeks, of lustre in her eyes. The magnificent light bathed the grass, the branches, her hair, her dress, her hands, in fitful brilliance. Each moment the innocent irresolution of her face seemed to alter subtly; and suddenly a blush swept over it as if she were ashamed. Mike

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knew that the somnolent emotions, which had always made a note of eagerness in her eyes, were waking; and his pulses trembled with an uneven beat.

"Give me a kiss," he said. She bent over him and kissed his forehead; and her lips were light and hot. He kept her in his arms.

Then he felt like a fragment of air, within and trembling with a coolness; and the coolness was within and trembling with a mass of red sunlight. His heartbeats grew fainter and fainter, as if they were the footsteps of excitement retreating from him.

Slowly, from far away, sounds detached themselves from the vagueness. Somewhere, in a spring or stream, globular tones were heard thickening and breaking. A woodpecker's hammering sounded like a drum and its echo. There was a squirrel scratching on a trunk. His mind floated among these sounds, forming with them a light, indifferent contact, as a drifting boat touches the shores of uninhabited islands.

Rosalia was forgotten. He was almost unaware that his arms encircled an invisible form, whose definite identity had been lost, leaving only an anonymous contact. He opened his eyes. They recognized Rosalia with such bewilderment, he might have forgotten who was with him.

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Her face had never been so flushed. Over her forehead hung loose wisps of hair. Her mouth was rigid, her eyes open, and on their hard blue surfaces tears collected, and crossed the reddened lids, and ran upon her cheeks. Mike was terrified. He tightened his arms, and stammered, "What—what's the matter? Don't cry! Rosalia! Speak to me!"

There was a convulsive tremor; her open lips formed words, and none were uttered. Wild with disappointment and a kind of resentment, he almost shook her. He drew himself to his knees. How long, he wondered, had he lain beside her, ignorantly happy—how long had she been crying?

Now she wept without restraint. Tears came to his eyes. He glared helplessly about for an escape from this misery and shame. Over them loomed the tree, over it loomed the hills, over them loomed the sky. There was the tainted water with its greenish surface. There were the stagnant vistas, the trunks wallowing in plants. Between them and him lay the sobbing girl.

Then suddenly her weeping ceased. She put her clothes in order and dried her eyes. She attempted to smile.

"What was the matter?" he repeated.

She raised her eyes to his face, and for a moment enmity and love were balanced in them. Slowly the enmity weakened; tenderness filled them with a

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curious peace. "Never mind," she said. "Leave me alone a few minutes. I'll be all right. Go after the cattle. I'll wait for you here."

He was inclined to laugh at his momentary terror. Nevertheless, the chance of her weeping again was intolerable, the desire to escape persisted; so he accepted her suggestion, feeling a little ashamed of his willingness.

Rosalia had returned in time for supper with her parents; and Mike ate by himself after the milking was done. The light poured richly out of the lampshade on the blue table-cloth, leaving the ceiling high and soft, and the three faces in a yellow dimness. At first he was relieved, seeing no signs of terror or remorse in her reticent face. He looked at the mother, and decided that she had thought of their absence together; but she seemed to have rejected whatever fears she might have entertained. Jule poured over his newspaper as if he had never feared anything, looking up at his family now and then contentedly. Mike's eyes returned to the girl, and then saw, or imagined he saw, an extraordinary expression on her face. It seemed to say that she had been deserted. It was courageous without confidence or hope. Mike was bewildered; but when she sat down in a corner with a book, he ceased to try to understand. She turned the pages listlessly; he wondered if she was reading; and the lamplight fell only on her hair.

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mercy; sometimes there was a deliberate taunt in her allusions to his character and duty. Then suddenly there would rise in her a faint voluptuous tumult, impersonal and hypnotic. She seemed to listen to it rise, as if it were strange, unearthly music. Then she forgot everything in passion, with a self-conscious merriment which seemed a little vicious, with fitful mockery, or a dull ecstasy. She seemed to know that she was the victim of her emotion, and to give herself up to it consciously, almost in despair. Penetrating his delight, he sometimes heard a little sound of piercing laughter.

Now, after their love-making, she did not cry, lying very still with an expressionless face; but the crying or a dry, harsh grief came afterward, inevitably, the next day or the next. Her skin was whiter than ever, white like a transparent stone. She grew thinner; and between her eyebrows and eyelids there appeared small blue shadows. Her blushes were quick to come and go, yellowish pink and very high on her cheeks. In her mother's presence she ignored Mike; and fear of her suspicions forced a thin smile and commonplace words to her lips. Except with Mike alone, she never ceased to imitate a carefree, innocent girl.

Selma looked on. She watched the traces of Rosalia's excitement vanish and disappear, studied Mike with her arrogant yet pitiful glances, and looked anxiously at the girl again. Her repose was

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strained and watchful. As the two women faced one another in a constant questioning and constant refusal to answer, Mike felt anew their kinship. Did Selma know, by knowing herself, that it would be dangerous to interfere? Did she know what had happened? Mike thought not; but the possibility of a kiss would be as serious to her as betrayal to some mothers. Often Mike looked at her face, pre-occupied and suspicious, and felt that she was forming a plan to destroy whatever it was that she thought was menacing Rosalia, and wondered if she could destroy him, and how. And if she didn't, and he kept Rosalia for his sweetheart, or married her, wouldn't the same spirit rise in her to do her mother's work?

Rosalia referred to marriage less frequently, but talked feverishly about religion, trying to convert him, with outbursts of emotion which kept reminding him that it was a disguise of the other conflict. Sometimes he gave in, to quiet her; and then her exultation rose to an intensity which made the inevitable revelation of his disagreement more tragic. There were periods of silence, and periods when she avoided him.

He was utterly miserable, and his misery fought on her side. Now he thought ceaselessly of marriage, without desire, but simply as an escape from the trap. Was it an escape? Sometimes his premonition of a lifetime of loneliness was so strong

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that it made him turn cold. He remembered the fat preacher shouting about hell at old Mr. Duncan's funeral, and Jule's expression, as if he saw a disaster which no one else saw. He had always an air of vague disillusionment, neither happy nor unhappy. How had he lived? Mike wondered about the woman called Bad Han, whom he had loved as a boy. Surely she was more like him than Selma; why hadn't he married her? As a girl Selma must have been like Rosalia; Jule must have fallen in love with her exactly as he had done. What would he say? Mike felt that if he could talk to him—if he were not Rosalia's father but only his friend—he would know what to do.

The strongest of the forces which had trapped him was his passion, which did not abate, but flourished on his unhappiness. Rosalia's morbid loveliness roused in him an ever fiercer hunger. He was drawn to her each time as if it were the first, but with a craving terribly sharpened, and a resentment of that craving which mounted with it. He never slept soundly, and thought that he was going to be sick; and out of his weakness a sensuality such as he had never experienced rose, feeding on his uncertainty, enervation, and fear. Her incoherent reproaches and her reckless moods kept him in a state of extreme sensibility, from which the only surcease was the love-making which caused them.

Rosalia also seemed helpless to save herself. Her

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sense of sin, her shame and fear, the frustration of her desire to marry, the apparent exhaustion of her power even to plead with him, should have protected her from love; but they did not. Time after time these restraints were eaten thinner from within, and broke; and the impersonal, inscrutable passion flamed through. Her individuality seemed to deteriorate with her self-control; and it was a common, desperate excitement which he held in his arms. She, too, constantly forgot her sorrow, and in forgetfulness renewed the causes of sorrow.

Sometimes Mike felt more sharply the resentment which his unhappiness provoked than the unhappiness itself, distaste more bitterly than regret.

One day Jule said to Mike, with an unwilling air, as if someone had forced him to speak, "See here, Mike, you're not trifling with my little girl, are you?" He did not stop for an answer. "I can see that you're in love with one another."

An expression of alarm passed over Mike's face. Jule added quickly, "My wife doesn't know it yet. Maybe she doesn't see as sharp as I, and anyhow, she doesn't want to see."

Mike could not answer, and Jule did not seem to care. "I'm not an old maid. I guess you know that. And I'm not much for religion and morals and so on." He paused, and his eyes wandered dreamily around the stable where they were working. "But when I was a boy. . . . A girl, my girl

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before I got married. . . . She went to Fond du Lac and became a whore.

"And I like you. I reckon a girl like Rosalia won't pick out another boy I'd like so well. I'm getting on in years, and have to baby myself on account of this confounded rupture. I'd be pretty sick if Rosalia brought home some lazy rascal, or a parson. But I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle, though I'll be damned if I see why I should.

"Listen, Mike. I s'pose Rosalia would marry you like a shot. I'll bet that's why she's getting so thin. But what d'you think? Sure you want her? And there's this—her mother'd hate it." He smiled grimly. "She'd like the parson. But the main thing is, d'you think she's the girl for you? Rosalia had a pretty strict bringing up. I shouldn't wonder if she thinks you'll be a parson." He paused, and looked bluntly into Mike's face. "So, I don't want you kids to get into any trouble. Funny, I feel as though you were mine too." He put up his fork. "Now, I'm going to go to the house, and be lazy. You can finish this."

Mike felt a lump in his throat as he watched Jule go slowly up the lawn. It occurred to him that he hadn't said a word. But he knew what he must do; he had been right about Jule.

Mike and Dan spent many hours together during those summer months. The boy knew of his

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friend's relation to Rosalia; and Mike delighted in the wonder which appeared in his eyes when they spoke of it. Dan ripened as if he had joined in their passion, and became less shrinking, less melancholy, and worked more contentedly in his father's fields. It seemed strange to Mike that he should draw his keenest gratification in the episode from the boy. But he never referred to his unhappiness; indeed he forgot it when he was with Dan. He said that Rosalia wanted him to marry her, and that he was not sure that he wanted to, or sure that it was wise; he was a wanderer, not a marrying man; and he mentioned his lack of religious faith and Mrs. Bier's hostility. But partly for the boy's sake, and partly to cast over his experience, for a few moments, a glamour which would hide his disappointment from himself, he avoided any reference to Rosalia's misery, or to his increasing sense of something intolerable and sick closing down upon him and stifling him. He perfected what had happened, as he spoke, like one who knows that soon he will have nothing but memories.

So it came about that Dan thought of Mike's love for Rosalia as a perfect, permanent thing. Moulded by his mother's idealism, it was natural for him to believe in ideal love. He had utter confidence in Mike not to cause suffering, and assumed a complete understanding between the lovers. He did not even notice that Mike's descriptions of

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the girl—once a kind of extravagant poetry—grew vague and infrequent, and finally ceased.

His own mind was full of physical imagery. The magnificence of love in the flesh had come into his imagination with a sumptuous radiance, like the pompous flowers slowly filling the summer. What he knew and what he had seen were clouded in his memory by a thick, bright atmosphere. Mike's ideas, displacing his mother's stern teaching, produced a drowsy peace. He delighted in the incoherence of his happiness. He liked to talk with his friend, idly forecasting life, and listening by the hour to his stories of men and women. This made it easy for Mike to hide his distress.

Thus, once more, the boy lived in an unreal world. He guarded its boundaries, coloured it with his moods, spread over it a romantic mist, and took pleasure in its illusory gardens. Life seemed so harmonious that to live was to dream, to sleep and walk in one's sleep. He brooded upon his happy recollections, purified and perfected them, and made of them an endless daydream. Men were gods; he and Mike, even Rosalia, were like gods.

There were all the varieties of light, streaming, dripping, from the sun, and men and girls in love. They stroked the animals in the pastures, fingered their horns and their silky hides. For them the wheat, like oblong pearls, ripened in the heads; for

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them the fruit fell. The boy thought that life was this paradise.

Now it was easier for Dan to do the work he had to do. The weeks were broken by afternoons and evenings with Mike; and the muscular pain, the numbness, and the nausea—increasing faintly as the heat increased—fell now only as a very thin shadow on his happiness. He forgot his fatigue. His father's vague hostility troubled him only a little. Was the summer work in the heat almost intolerable for him too? In his childhood it had become a habit to pray; and an echo of prayer rose in him to a spirit in the summer: Let me endure its violence, let me not shrink, let my strength suffice.

Sustained by Mike's affection, it seemed to suffice. The man who worked for his father by the day, upon whose face, more and more red, the sweat sprang in great drops, was no longer repulsive. The reek of the hot animals did not disgust him. His mother, pale over the stove, and lying down beside his father in the sweltering nights, no longer aroused in him a sickly pity.

During the long, laborious days, from five in the morning until eight in the evening, they scarcely spoke. Each lived in the solitude of a crisis. Nothing was said of the ordeal of summer, of the labour that could not end until harvest was over.

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Each one measured his strength against the work he had to do; and in the silence of fatigue, there seemed to be heard a faint rejoicing. Dan lived the life of any farmer's son; but it was like the movement of a sleepwalker, who dreams meanwhile of gardens and love-making.

Then one day, as they sat at dinner, Jule came in. "Well," he said, "I've lost my hired man." Dan could not swallow the food which was in his mouth.

"Why, what's the matter?" his mother asked.

"Oh, he was restless, and wanted to get back to town. But it doesn't matter; I've no fall work. You know, I think I can manage without one. I feel all right."

"You'd better see what Dr. McGovern says."

Dan tried to conceal his emotion; but he saw their eyes move to his face. "I expect our youngster will miss his friend," his father said. The boy had to get up and hurry out on the porch.

Late that afternoon Mike and Jule stopped with a bag of binder-twine. Mike was pale, and when he saw the boy, looked frightened. The reticence which they felt that the presence of the older men imposed upon them was hard to endure. When Jule and Dan's father went into the granary for a moment, Mike said, "Well, Dannie, I'm off."

Dan could not answer.

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"Meet me on the Grimes road tonight after supper, about half past eight."

The men returned; and Dan went about his work.

The road was long and blanched. Over the hill between the dark honey-locusts he saw Mike coming. What has happened, what has happened? a voice in his mind kept repeating.

They were silent. Mike threw an arm over his shoulder; and they walked a little farther, and stopped. With the toe of his shoe, Mike pushed some stones about in the dust, pale and soft like ashes. "Don't cry, Dannie," he said. "Don't cry. I'll see you again. We'll meet somewhere."

"Where are you going?"

"I can't tell you exactly, 'cause I don't know yet. Milwaukee first."

Their voices were pinched and lifeless. Dan's tears ceased to rise; and he dried his cheeks. Suddenly his love had taken the form of pride. As if to display his pride, he spoke of Rosalia.

"I hope she understands," Mike said, in a tight, empty voice. "I am going partly for her sake. I think this is the best thing for her."

For a moment, Dan hesitated between two possible interpretations of these words. Was Mike tired of her? Was he leaving her? Had they quarreled? Were there aspects of their relationship he did not know about? The last question meant that he had been shut out, that his friend had with-

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held a part of his experience from him. The pain of disappointment which it brought was unbearable, and drove him to the other interpretation. It had become impossible to continue to live as sweethearts at Rosalia's home. So Mike was going away. Probably Rosalia would join him a little later, and they would be married. His faith in Mike made him content with this explanation.

"My aunt and uncle won't let you marry. Will they?" he asked, trying in the dim light to find an answer in his friend's eyes.

"No. No. . . . I think they wouldn't."

There was a pause which eliminated from the boy's mind everything but their own relationship, their personal farewell. "But we are friends. We won't lose one another, will we?" he said.

"No, Dannie, we won't."

"Oh, I don't want you to go. I've never had a friend." His voice grew unsteady.

"And I don't want to go. How beautiful the country is!"

Large and ripe, the bundles of grain stood together. Cowbells rang delicately. The sky, diaphanous and yellow at the edge, reared to a thick, almost black vault. Vapours drifted out of the hollows and thickets, and languidly crossed the grass. They walked down the road.

They spoke, and faltered; and the incomplete

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sentences faded away, like the speech of the birds in the impenetrable trees getting ready to sleep. They referred in elliptical phrases to their friendship and the summer's happenings, and referred to their separation only by the silences. These grew longer and longer, until they drifted without any speech up and down the dark road.

In a moment before the parting many memories rose in Dan's mind, one after another: the picnic, the many conversations, the first talk in the cemetery, his grandfather's funeral; and his mind seemed to fly backward across the summer, to the spring, to his loneliness, his ignorance and bewilderment. He thought of his earlier boyhood, measuring the changes which had taken place in him, and felt that at least a part of Mike would remain with him, within himself.

"Well, Dannie, till we meet again. . . ." The light sound of his voice made infinitely more poignant the sadness which it attempted to conceal. "And don't forget me."

Once more, tears came to the boy's eyes. "I couldn't. You could. Don't."

In their short, brusque kiss there was an implication of something like despair. It suggested that their almost playful leave-taking expressed a willingness to part which neither really felt, that if they had let their full emotion be expressed, as in

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that moment it began to be expressed, there would have been revealed more bitterness than they dared admit.

“Good-bye, Mike.”

“Good-bye, Dannie. Be a good boy.”

By this time the darkness had increased so that they immediately lost sight of each other. Dan went home, a little dazed, through the heavy hanging darkness, between acres of grain, under many trees, over creeks trickling delicate, broken melodies. He thought of Rosalia, and regretted that he had not questioned Mike more exactly about her and about their plans, so that he and she could comfort each other in their loneliness.

During the night he decided to see Mike again before he went. He fell asleep trying to remember the early morning trains for Milwaukee. He got up at five-thirty, milked his four cows, pretended to eat breakfast, saddled Darby, and slapping her hind-quarters with the reins, galloped clumsily toward Beeler.

When he entered the kitchen he knew that he was too late. His aunt was clearing the breakfast table, with an expression of uneasy satisfaction on her face, humming meanwhile a melancholy hymn. Rosalia leaned heavily against the cupboard by the window like a dead body.

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**T**HE girl turned away from the window. Her mother's face was vigilant and grim—the face of a jailer. There was her cousin with eager eyes, spying upon her. She feared him because he might know her secret; she hated him because he had received a part of Mike's love, of which all that she herself had received was now taken away. Jailer and spy.

As she moved she was aware of the deadness of everything. The feeling began in her body, suddenly limp and insensate, and spread to the world around her. In the sweetish odour of the room there was a hint of corruption. The sunlight curled through the windows and drooped over the floor. She turned sickly from the table, where her mother was preparing a roast for the oven—a mass of meat with a deep, tight wound in the centre, from which blood dripped in small goutts—and went out on the porch. The landscape was dead: rotten greens, more blood-red drops in the garden, the great glazing eye of the pond, the bony roofs of Beeler—their stench escaping from blunt chimneys. And high above was the hot white sky like a corpse-flower. Everything was dead.

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In the centre of these things, in the centre of herself was a point of consciousness, like a heart, still alive. Being strangled, being suffocated, being crushed, but still living. The deadness of the whole world pressed upon it: gigantic thicknesses, layer on layer, all dead; something crude pushing; something sharp pricking and piercing; something like a blanket stifling. Someone was gone; she did not know who he had been, she did not really know that he was gone; but where something had been was now this vacuum all around her, and herself being slowly, extremely slowly and mightily crushed.

The summer drew near its end.

She moved, ate, and slept, automatically. This animated death had a tragic solemnity. She would not share the solemnity, even to the extent of revealing the tragedy, and presented to her parents a cunningly normal face, with changing expressions and smiles—more animated death, the true nature of which had in turn to be disguised. Her mother's scrutiny haunted her—the large, questioning eyes and drooping mouth, which she came to dread and from which she never escaped, as if that face had been a trunkless mask hanging in the air and following her. It was the only thing in the world outside her own mind of which she was aware. The landscape had only a spectral existence; her father was a spectre; her body a dead weight. But something

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within herself, meanwhile, was alive as a sore is alive.

For many days she felt a burning emotion. She did not know what it meant. During those days she remembered Mike only as a hired man who had gone. The obliteration of her memories, including the nature of their relationship, was the last effort of her mind to save itself. The burning emotion clouded these intolerable memories; but one day it lifted, and she saw them again clearly.

Then she remembered what they had done together. She remembered that the result of love was the birth of a child. Her mother had instructed her, long ago. In the tumult of her passions she had forgotten. But one thing she had never forgotten—that what they had done was sin. So her child would be a child of sin. She remembered how her mother had intended her to make use of this knowledge, and thought what it meant to her now. She burst into shrill laughter and ran outdoors. Her mother was standing by the stove, and turned upon her a terrified look; and a dismayed cry—“Rosalia, what on earth is the matter?”—followed her.

Thereafter the core of consciousness inside herself assumed a new meaning. She thought, I am with child. It seemed to take a definite place in her body; and she never again freed her attention

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from it. I am an unmarried mother, she said to herself; my child has no father; the rest of my life is shame; my parents will put me out of their house.

She could not rest. Even in her sleep she dreamed that she was being driven from place to place, in a universe of places. She kept up her pretence of ordinary life before her parents with increasing vigilance, but watched greedily for chances to escape from affection and observation. She took every opportunity to leave the house, to wander over the fields and through the woods.

The landscape surged back out of oblivion with a livid grandeur. The leaves seemed enormous, sagging on horny branches. There were swollen flowers, flowers wilting and pushing out fat seeds. She could have been seen before a bank of sod or a haystack where she might have lain with her sweet-heart, standing and sobbing. But the cultivated fields and open forests wearied her, being a part of the human scheme—grain to eat, pasture to feed the cattle so that they might give milk to drink—to which she no longer belonged.

She liked the marsh best. The slime, the roots, the bright berries, some of which were poisonous, the sluggish brooks, the small creeping animals, the ponds, the kettles, the sink-holes, the dying ferns were sympathetic. She felt as if she were saying good-bye to all the landscape, and leaving the marsh last because it was most like her life at the end.

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She made a little cradle, and put a milkweed pod in it for a baby, and buried it under small stones.

Like the sun in the sky, dancing with every abrupt movement, a young male face, a laughing face, a face full of malevolent tenderness hovered. That was the father of her child—her glittering child, her dead child (was it a child at all?), her withered child, her illusory child. His face would not go away, and it would not come any nearer. He seemed to be waiting there to see what would happen to his child.

She stared at a pool of mud, and imagined that there was a little body in it. Its watery blue eyes, its clutching fingers, the down upon its little head—she could not see them, but knew that they were there. The surface of the mire never stirred. Woe to the unmarried mothers, she thought, who dare not bring forth their babies, but must hide them forever under their hearts. Under their hearts they will die (under her heart it would die). She saw its delicate skin covered with sores; it rotted and burned, and became a tiny relic of ashes, which, when she touched it with one finger, collapsed. Her eyeballs pressed forward in their sockets; and scalding tears ran down her cheeks.

Some water-birds clamoured in the trees. She began to run; but her feet tangled in the underbrush.

She paused by the reedy lake. The water was at

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once bleak and soft. From one shore a hell-diver moved out, so light that the beating of its feet under the water made its breast shudder upon the waveless surface. It moved with a slight buoyance, as if to meet another bird, knowing that there was no other, but going out nevertheless to meet it, marking the lake with a resolute line as its swam. There was no other bird visible. At last, it was alone in the exact centre of the lake, and seemed, for a moment, to turn and hesitate. Then swiftly and smoothly, it sank into the water, leaving a very faint, circular ripple, which swelled like a bubble and vanished as a bubble breaks. Rosalia knelt on the shore, and stretched out her hands, and dropped them with a splash into the water. It startled her by its coldness; and she rose and walked quickly home.

The next day her parents went to Rockhill; and she returned to the marshes, to busy herself like a child with tragic play. She picked the strangest leaves—pennyroyal, and sumach, and bittersweet, some wiry sprays of crimson berries, and tufts of autumn blossom—using her lifted skirt for a basket. Then she went to the old hawthorn, the one like a canopy, and decorated the grass beneath it with loose bouquets and garlands, making a festive bed, with a pile of berries for a pillow—singing as she worked, “Oh where and oh where is my highland laddie gone?”

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Then she stood up and looked at the improvised shrine, suddenly ceased to sing, and gritting her teeth, stamped on the flowers and leaves. The stiff twigs of the hawthorn caught in her hair; and it fell in a rough mass on her shoulders. She began to cry; the hot, streaming tears and convulsive sobs weakened her; and she stood still, wringing her hands. Then she gathered up the broken flowers and thrust them into her hair, and covered her dress with leaves, and set off aimlessly into the marsh. After a while she sang again. In an upland field overhanging the hollow, she saw a farm-hand stop his plough and stare at her; and she turned deeper into the forest, out of sight.

Driving back from Rockhill that afternoon, Dan saw her walking ahead of him down the marsh road. The rank vegetation which had filled the ditches beside it had sucked up the stinking water which had been there. A hot spice rose from the leaves, the bitterness of decay from the roots. The road divided the swamp like the incision of a knife; and the desolate corpulence of swale and bough rolled away on both sides. Down the stony, overhung thoroughfare the girl hurried. Dan shouted to her. She paused, looked back, and waited.

“Where are you going? Get in, and I’ll take you along.”

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"Nowhere. Oh no . . . I'm just walking." She looked up at him, smiling wanly. "See what lovely flowers I've found."

Dan stared at the ominous petals, broken stems, and torn leaves. Her bright eyes were cold. There was something aimless, almost dreadful, in her posture, as if a current over which she had no control allowed her to stop there for a moment, but would suck her away. He said, "Why do you walk here? I think it's a dreadful place."

The girl laughed softly. "Don't you know that it's my home? I saw," she added, "a dear little mud-hen, and she couldn't find the other one."

Dan was puzzled. He had been thinking about a story by Balzac which he had read, wondering how soon he could learn enough French to read French books; and he could not understand what her words implied. Were there tears in her eyes? For a moment he began to think of her, to imagine what was in her mind; but his hand rested on the book which lay in the seat beside him; and it drew his attention back to his own serene life. He said, "I've been reading such a good story."

Her expression seemed almost scornful. "Good-bye," she said. "I'll be at home before you are." She vanished between two great bushes; the boughs swung together and shivered; and there were only the retreating sounds of her feet as they snapped dry twigs and swept through the grass.

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He called, "Rosalia, Rosalia! Come back, and go with me! What is the matter?" But she did not answer.

No suspicions, however, rose in his mind. His explanation of what had happened was very simple: Mike had gone away because her mother disapproved of his love for Rosalia, and in time he would send for her. Meanwhile he waited for a letter. Every day he stood beside the tin mail-box on its post, and watched the approach of the splay-footed mare, the wagon like a box on wheels, the tiny, tobacco-stained man handing out letters and papers. He waited serenely, and worked hard in the harvest-fields, and in his leisure hours read as many of the books Mike had praised as he could get from the library in Rockhill.

After dinner one day a neighbour stopped to see his father; and Dan lay on the cellar-door with a book. He overheard his mother and his aunt Selma talking on the porch.

"How is Jule getting on without a man?" That was his mother's voice.

"Very well, I think," his aunt answered. "As for me, I am glad he is gone. As I told you, I was afraid Rosalia would care for him."

"How does she feel about him now?"

"Oh I don't believe she thinks of him any more. Do you know," Selma said sharply, "that was a dangerous boy. He will do much harm wherever

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he goes. Corrupting the minds of younger boys and girls with his modern city ideas. He was not a Christian. He had no moral stamina. I was afraid for our children."

Dan's mother said, "I am glad that I can trust my boy. I need never fear bad companions for him."

They were silent. Dan was glad to know what they thought.

He decided to ask Rosalia if she had heard from Mike. They were in the faded garden.

"Oh yes, I have had a letter," she said. "Would you like to see it?" She drew something out of her dress, and put it in his hands, and walked swiftly toward the house as if embarrassed.

Dan went to the barn to read the letter. He trembled as he took it out of his pocket; but it was only an empty envelope addressed to his uncle Jule. He was bewildered. Had she given him this accidentally? Or did she prefer not to let him see what Mike had written? He never asked her again.

The autumn shrivelled, grew stale and grew stern. The apples which stayed on the boughs now stayed to rot. The grain was threshed. Rains flattened the stubble. The shocked corn stood like an army of scarecrows. Men sat in the muddy fields, all their rawhide gloves having beaks of steel to tear the corn-husks; and they tossed the hard ears in piles. On every hill the trees, flapping like banners, faded

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and frayed. Nuts fell; their husks contracted and pushed them out, bone-white, in the dead grass. Solemn children entered the groves with baskets.

The stark architecture of the sky stood up extremely clear. Dull, troubled gusts poured through its vaults. There was a bleakness and a cloud. The cloud was driven, and became a herd of clouds. One was like an iron bubble. There were bald rocks and no more flowers.

Rosalia was ready for Normal School; but her parents thought she was not strong enough to go; and her indifference seemed a further sign of ill health; so she stayed at home. The neighbours warned them of lung trouble; and everyone thought it was a good thing that she spent her time walking about the country, for sometimes the cold made her thin cheeks red. It was Dan's last winter of high school. He drove Darby to Rockhill every Sunday afternoon, put her in a livery stable where she earned her keep during the week, and drove home Friday afternoon.

The second Sunday in December he left the farm early, and stopped to see two distant cousins, old people named Guildford, whom he called uncle and aunt. Uncle Rob was the station agent at Mattville, a town about four miles from Beeler. He had open, watery eyes, and hair like the pelt of an old fox, and large freckled hands. His wife was brown and sardonic, always dressed in black alpaca, with

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her coarse hair in tight knots. She was an authority on the private life of the country, of which she discoursed in an abrupt, jeering manner. She managed, however, to be discreet as well as inquisitive, received everyone's confidences, and was almost disreputably tolerant. When Dan entered their sitting-room, he saw that his coming pleased her. She looked at him as a judge would look at one of a series of witnesses summoned to testify. After the usual inquiries about the health of the family, she said, "Rob, tell Dannie what you told me. You know we decided it was best."

"Now, Permelia . . . It's really none of our business."

"Business? My word! Everything that's happened to the Duncans since the year one has been my business. And if you don't, I will."

"What is it, uncle Rob?" Dan asked.

"Well, Dannie . . . Your cousin came to me the other day and said she was going to marry this here hired man Jule had. She says she's going to run away. She's going to meet him in Mayville or else in Milwaukee, and maybe she'd get a chance to go to Mayville in an automobile, but if she doesn't she's going to take the train. She said she wanted to tell me, in case she wouldn't have a chance to when she went, and she thought I'd want to know where she was going. Now I had to promise I wouldn't tell her dad, but I feel as though I'd ought to."

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"You're a great one!" his wife exclaimed. "That would set fire to the business! Now, Dannie, what do you know about these goings-on?"

Dan hesitated. Then he said, "Yes. I knew they were in love. Aunt Selma didn't like Mike because he wasn't religious, and——"

"Isn't that Selma all over? She can thank her stars Jule wasn't religious, or she'd never have got him. Well, she's a strong woman."

"Now Permely, let the boy talk."

"So," Dan continued, "I guess that's why Mike went away. I don't see what good it would do to tell them."

"Neither do I," aunt Permelia agreed, clicking her knitting needles.

"When did she say she was going?" Dan asked.

"Towards the end of the week, or the first of next."

"Well," the old woman broke out, "if the girl wants him, she'd better be let to have him. These Duncans, they won't be fooled with. Rob, do you remember Lizzie? (That was your grandfather Duncan's sister.) They wouldn't let her get married—Lord knows the man was a lazy tippler—but it ended with her dangerous to her own folks. They had to set up a cage for her in the spare-room, made of poles from the ceiling to the floor—there weren't any asylums then—and they could walk around the edge of the room, and feed her through

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the bars, and Lizzie sat in there all day playing with dolls."

To Dan's amazement, the old woman's eyes had filled with tears. She wiped them away on her apron, without pausing in her talk. "Now, I'd not like to have to deal with Selma if she'd not had her own way. And Rosalia looks to me like a chip off the old block. What's more, that man of hers is a strong, good-natured fellow. What if he's not religious? There's more ways than one of worshipping the Lord Almighty. What if somebody had prevented Selma from getting Jule away from that Madoc girl? There'd have been another cage built, I'll bet."

"Permely, Permely," her husband protested. "You hadn't ought to talk so."

"Anyway, Dannie's right. We'll all hold our tongues, and let the children get married, as the Lord meant they should. There'll be time enough to tell Selma, after the mischief's done. A marriage is a marriage. She'll see she's beat, and be nice to them. And so she ought."

Dan went away very happy. He felt as if he had heard from Mike, and was a link in the secret chain which ensured his happiness. He thought of nothing else all week, wondering where they would live, and planning to visit them. On Friday afternoon the sky was full of dark clouds; there was a high wind; and it looked so threatening that he tele-

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phoned his mother that he would wait until the next day, and come home then if it did not storm, or if the storm were over.

There was a part of the swamp where it was not safe for a human being to go. The ground was unstable, spread with pools of slime, around which crowded old trees with scaly limbs and enormous trunks lifting out of the muck. In it were many sink-holes and half submerged water-courses. It was visible from the edge of the marsh as a dark knot of tamarack tops, a great, tangled shadow on the monotonous horizon.

The storm appeared to gather over that place. The clouds wrestled there, sinking and fading upward; and a candle-white radiance sprang up and broke against their swollen surfaces. Rosalia stood in the withered garden, her sharp, white face pressed forward, as if a transparent barrier separated her from the clouds through which she was trying to break in order to mingle with them. She watched the storm gather. The wind was icy, and had begun to be shrill about the eaves and the gable of the barn; the windmill spun sharply. She turned up the collar of her coat, not taking her eyes from the place where the darkest part of the earth was confused with the darkest part of the sky. The lowering heavens were the colour of iron, with pallid channels running back and forth, up which the

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wind whipped fragments of mist, and a pallid ring above the horizon, which, very slowly, seemed to tighten.

As she watched, her mind was on the child which she believed to be alive within her—the child which as it lived left nothing for her but death. Where was there any other refuge? What could she do? She shuddered as the wind penetrated her thin clothes and tightened upon her in a heartless embrace; but it was almost a comfort. Who was her friend? There were the tight clouds, with pitch-black folds and waxen breasts. She felt a kinship with them, and with that most desolate portion of the marsh, which rose up under them and was lost in their upheaval and their ceaseless sinking. They were all she had.

In the house behind her one lamp was lit; smoke flooded from the chimney. Her mother was there, with her dreadful eyes. In her daily examination of her body Rosalia had discovered no changes; but perhaps they were so gradual that her eye was tricked, perhaps through ignorance she had failed to recognize what would betray her; perhaps her mother would see tonight, or had already seen. Her fingers twitched helplessly on the edge of her coat.

She would go away, she would go away. She would run away. Somewhere there must be a place of freedom, a place without terror, where she could

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have her baby, like other women, in peace. Then she began to dream, as she had dreamed so often, that she was going to Mike, that he would marry her and take care of her, and the child would be their child, which they would show proudly to everybody. The clouds on which her eyes were fixed—writhing like human bodies in agony, pressing convulsively about an aperture and bringing forth nothing—mocked her; but she dreamed on, in spite of them. How sweet it would be: the cradle, the sunlight on the cradle. . . .

A few large raindrops appeared in the wind, drops of ice water that cut her face as if they were solid. It grew still darker; and suddenly her clouds were lost, for the whole sky was full of their counterparts, and the heart of the marsh was obliterated by the scattered, heavy drops; but still she did not move, trying to discern, in the dusk of the storm, her place of refuge.

Then she heard her mother's voice, calling from the porch behind her, "Rosalia! Come in, come in! You'll catch your death!"

She clapped her hands over her mouth to suppress a cry of resentment, and went into the house. "There is going to be the most terrible storm there ever was," she said to her mother dully.

The gathering storm hypnotized her; she could not cease to watch it, and stood by the window. Suddenly the wind filled with hail. Livid white

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lumps as large as marbles leaped on the dead lawn, and pounded on the roof.

"I hope your poor father isn't caught in this," her mother said. She heard, but did not care, for she was thinking of her departure. It was true that she was going to join her lover-husband; it was true also that there was no lover-husband, no one at all; both were true. But the second truth was the one that her mother must never discover, for it was her shame. How could she keep her from finding out?

After a moment she hurried upstairs, and packed most of her clothes into an old Gladstone bag. It was dark in the hall; and she was able to bring it down and hide it behind the door without being seen. Then she called to her mother in the kitchen, "I must shut the windows in the hen-coop."

Her mother said, "Put on your rubbers and a heavy coat."

It was terribly cold. The wind screamed. The hail had softened to a thin sleet; but it was evident from the clouds thickening and turning black overhead and the descending temperature that much snow would fall before morning. Rosalia was glad that there was no danger of meeting her father in the barns. She darted across the yard, trying to hide her bag under her coat, and went into the wagon-shed.

It was a long narrow building with two small windows. She waited a moment for her eyes to

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become accustomed to the extreme darkness. All the vehicles stood there in two rows with an aisle between them. At one end there was a loft, on which were piled a battered squirrel's cage, some wheels, broken tools, boxes, and barrels. She felt her way, and climbed to the seat of a lumber-wagon, swung her bag into the loft, and clambered up. She found a barrel full of old clothes which her mother was saving for rag-carpets, pulled out the rags, put the bag in the bottom, and packed them in again on top of it. Now, she thought, mother will know that I have run away to Mike. When she returned to the house, she stopped on the porch to brush the dust from her skirt, lest her mother question her.

Mechanically, she set the table for supper. Meanwhile the narrow space which, in the twilight, was all that remained of the air filled with snow. Had the wind abated, or was it merely muffled by the heavy flakes? Falling with a tormented motion, they diffused in their descent a bluish light, a charnel light which mingled, near the windows, with the lamplight.

Her father returned. He was covered with snow, which had penetrated every seam, and frozen in his hair. He slapped his hands together. "Lord, what a storm! There'll be no telephone wires up to-morrow. The snow is still wet, but it'll all be ice by morning. I'm glad I've no young cattle running on the marsh. It'd go hard with 'em."

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Rosalia listened intently.

When they went to bed, she put out her light, and dropped to her knees before the window. She pressed her face on the ice-cold pane. The snow beat steadily against it. Her heart throbbed, very slowly; and she imagined the child within her throbbing like another heart. She thought of the time when her pains would begin, and in unspeakable suffering the little body would become separate from her body, and she would hold it in her arms. For awhile she existed in both times, that future time and the present; and little by little they drew together and were one. Against her burning cheeks the cold was sweet; and out of the tumult she heard, again and again, a silvery voice calling.

Several hours had passed. The house was still. Outside was the sombre uproar of the wind, the noise of the trees, and the soft pelting of the snow. She arose, opened and closed her door, and crept downstairs. Moving very cautiously, she found her overcoat and hat and rubbers. She opened the house-door, shivering at its sharp creak, and shut it behind her.

The night engulfed her abruptly. She paused on the lawn, in the whirling snow, and stretched out her hands, and said in a clear, high voice—as if she were waving farewell as she drove gaily away in a carriage to her wedding—“Good-bye! Good-bye! God bless you!” But the wind drowned her voice,

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so that she herself scarcely heard the words.

Then she hurried down the road. It was so dark that her eyes were of little use, but moving in despair, she needed them little. Within the night and the storm were, for her, surroundings and situations which were not there, in which she seemed to be doing other things than those she did. The icy wind whipped her and shook her; she stumbled and fell, got up and hurried on.

As she became accustomed to the darkness, she could discern horrible forms, slightly blacker than the mass of the night: spikes thrusting at her face, huge, shrouded bodies, and immense shadows, weakly upheld, which balanced over her and threatened to fall. If she had been able to think, she would have recognized them as fence-posts and trees, hillsides, houses, and barns. But her experience, all her memories, were obliterated by the onslaught of anguish and terror, by the pain which meant to her, being a mother. Some of the dark shapes gathered at her back, and drove her on. Often she ran until she lost her breath.

Her feet automatically took the direction they had taken all that autumn, day after day. She came to the edge of the marsh, and fumbled at a gate with trembling hands; but the latch was covered with ice and would not open; so she climbed over it, tearing her skirt. In the lane the ground was full of frozen ruts, and there were stumps and

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large rocks; she fell to her knees at every second or third step. She cut her fingers on a barbed wire fence; and the blood congealed quickly. The cold numbed her hands and feet; but her delirious agony—the agony of the child-birth taking place in her mind—rose and fell, crest after crest.

Like a thousand enormous hounds in the sky, the storm howled. It grew colder. Her body was racked by shivers, her teeth chattered; but she did not hear. A great tree fell; the rotten wood cracked and split with a noise like the discharge of many guns; the shuddering boughs crashed to the ground; the forest all about rocked and reverberated; but she did not hear. She slipped and stumbled down the steep road, and at last reached the marsh-bottom.

There, in the hollow, the fury of the storm decreased. The tall, invisible hills and the myriad branches threshing overhead broke its force. But the paralysing cold thickened around her, not only raining from the sky, but curling up like a vapour from the ground. The wet air crystallized slowly to a brittle iciness.

She fell upon a rock and lay for a few moments unconscious.

Then she dreamed of a burning fever, of white sheets on which she lay, of someone with an enormous red face bending over and shouting, "Be

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a brave girl;" and she was surprised that she could hear the unborn child, wailing. She asked, "How soon will it be here?" and the one with a red face answered, "Just a minute."

Her body regained its power of motion; but from that dream she never woke. There was incessant torture and a hoarse screaming. She knew nothing but that out of this agony the child would be born (without this agony it would never be born).

She lost the path. Her feet broke through the ice of brooks and pools, or sank above her ankles in the freezing mud. She struck her forehead on a low limb; and blood trickled down into her eyes. Nothing could stop her; she staggered on and on, in a delirium of flight. She ran into tree-trunks. Stunned so that she could not stand up, she crawled on her hands and knees, through the snow.

Suddenly there was a noise like the clanging of many shrill bells. One arm was around a tree; the other hand touched another tree. She did not know they were trees; her hands were so numb that they could not feel the bark. She sat down between them.

The snow fell. The cold increased.

Her torment diminished. A powerful voice said then, "The child is born." Was it dead? She knew that she was going to die. She had given birth to nothing.

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Dan woke early Saturday morning, and saw from his bed the swollen magnificence of every roof and tree, the snow still pouring down through the shadowy dawn. He dressed and went outdoors.

A man who was harnessing a team of horses to a bobsleigh beckoned to him. It was the little mail-man. "Hey, boy," he shouted. "I'm looking for a man to help me through the drifts. You live on my route. Come along and shovel, and I'll take you home."

They left the town behind them.

The telephone wires were down, writhing up out of the snow in great coils, coated with ice. The limbs of innumerable trees were broken, and hung down rigidly to the ground. For miles, no one had been over the road before them. There was not a sign of life anywhere. The falling snow, with a sinister softness, hung over the landscape, over the hills and flats of dull crystal. An old horse lay dead in a field, looking like the image of a giant horse carved in snow.

Where the road was cut into a hill or ran through a hollow, the drifts were too deep for the horses. They dug their way through them. Under the snow there was a hard crust of ice. They put the mail in the boxes along the road, and left a sack at the store in Beeler. They passed his uncle's house. It took them three hours to get to Hill Farm.

He found his father and mother still at breakfast,

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talking about the storm. They were glad to see him; his father was particularly pleased at the way he had come. They spoke of the damage to the orchards, and the probable loss of young stock. Dan put on dry clothes.

A cutter drew up in front of the house; and Jule rushed in. His fur-coat was unbuttoned. His face was grey.

"Rosalia is gone," he said. "We didn't call her for breakfast. We thought she was asleep. Selma went up. She thought maybe she was sick. Selma didn't come down. I found her up there, fainted away on the floor. Rosalia's clothes and a satchel are gone."

There was a pause. Dan's mother stood up. "How terrible!" she cried. "But where has she gone?"

Jule held his large, shaking hands over the stove. Dan's heart pounded, though he was not frightened. Their eyes all turned to his face.

"Do you know anything about this, Dan?" his mother asked. She was terribly stern. His father's face darkened.

Jule said gruffly, but not unkindly, "Tell us, boy."

"I think . . ." he began; but his throat grew very tight. "I think she has gone to Mike. I think they——"

"How did you get home, Dan?" Jule interrupted.

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"I came with the mail-man this morning."

"Were there any tracks in front of our house when you went by?"

"Yes, there were."

"Had anybody gone on foot?"

"I think so."

"Well, that's that," Jule said. "I s'pose she walked. I s'pose she took the early train, either at Mattville or Mary Station."

"Did you know this?" Dan's mother asked sharply.

"They never told me. But last Sunday, Uncle Rob and Aunt Permelia said that she said she was going to be married."

His father looked at his mother; and his expression grew more hostile. She said, "Why didn't you tell us? You have done wrong."

"Mother, I promised them not to. I knew that Mike and Rosalia were in love." There was too much that he could not explain.

His mother's face was cold and bitter. She stared at him as if he were no longer her boy. He felt that it was true: he was no longer her boy, but a man.

"Don't scold him, John," Jule said. "I don't know what good it would have done." The fear had gone out of his face; and it had assumed a mysterious expression, an expression of acquiescence and understanding.

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He picked up his fur cap, and fumbled at the buttons of his coat. "I've got to hurry back to Selma. I'm almost afraid to tell her," he muttered, as he strode out of the house.



## BOOK THREE

# DAN ALONE

“The light of the body is in the eye;  
if therefore thine eye be single, thine  
whole body shall be full of light.”

*Matthew 6-22.*



## 1. PROFANE SPRING

**T**HE earth lay dead in its grave-cloths. Some women—minute black figures—went weeping from a poor house, following a corpse. Clouds mourned from horizon to horizon. Over the rough marble fields the sun rose between sun-dogs. The excrement of the cattle fell steaming on the frozen clods, and melted the ice to a crystal network. The barns and houses lay in the drifts like seeds.

A dead stillness endured for months.

Then February, like the architecture of a tomb, melted from sight. The cakes of ice broke, and trembled, and flowed off in lumpy currents. The drifts grew ghostly. Jets of water came up out of soiled springs. The dawn rose each day from its bed with an imperceptibly clearer lustre.

In April Wisconsin lay still in the palpitating coolness. Silvery boughs twined by the cold, streaming roads. Over the finger-shaped bulb the blood-root lifted its fallow leaf and porcelain star. The south wind cut through the vapours, scattering the birds that came with it. The socket of every leaf overflowed. The flats and bottom lands were flooded; and there, in their northward pilgrimage,

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mallard, bittern, and teal, hell-diver and snipe descended, and swam or hunted for food, looking like sombre flowers on the mud.

At dawn men brought out their restless mares, who laid back their short ears and nipped at one another, neighing provocatively, and pushed their ploughs into the sod, opening dark furrows. Colts with snarled names pounded over the meadows, screaming. A peculiar wildness seized the fowls; they fled out of the orchard, the last one leaping and gliding over the heads of the others; they paused, and turned one eye to the ground so that with the other they could see the twisting clouds or the cloudless sky. Their nervous behaviour was partly explained by the frequent appearance of red hawks, sliding ominously through the air, and uttering their beautiful scream.

Brooding upon the spring, Dan read Swinburne and Shelley; and when he went home for the weekends, he wandered over the meadows or worked in the garden, daydreaming, or repeating poems to himself. One night he dreamed that whinnying horses splashed river-shallows into a curious foam. Someone sent him to catch them, halter them, and shut them in their stable. They permitted him to touch their silky flanks, but struggled nevertheless. He wrestled with them, several at once slipping from or yielding to his arms; and strangely, the river-water rose and flowed over him.

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He woke; and then the moon seemed to grow out of the east. Its movement—not hesitant, not hurried—resembled the movement of the dream. He asked of love that degree of ease. So smoothly and spontaneously the experience of life should flow over him. The bare season would grow more voluptuous; and he would ripen as it ripened. It was time for him to love.

But the girls he knew were not beautiful. Their throats, their breasts were lean or coarse; they wore their hair in untidy nests over their ears, and stared at him with avid, watery eyes. Their men had hairy wrists and chapped mouths; when they walked, their clumsy legs pounded the ground. The girls seemed satisfied with them. What had he that they desired? What had they that he desired?

But for Mike he might have withdrawn once more from life, shut out experience once more. He might have given in to the weakness of his desire and his cold fastidiousness. There were his books and his daydreams; he might have tried to live in them. There were his sense of superiority to satisfy his pride, his sense of the ugliness of reality to excuse him for letting it go unconquered. But Mike's face seemed to watch him in his own mind. It seemed to ask him for an expression of his affection for him in love of someone else. It seemed to say, If you believed me, you will be happy.

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Every Sunday night he went back to Rockhill. Weary of the enigma of his share in the spring, he scarcely saw the town—the zinc-white houses under old, emaciated elms, the feeble crocusses, the in-harmonious shrubbery and rich, wet sod, the church, the dance-hall, the untidy cemetery. He scarcely heard the great trains thundering through, or the faded red freights shunting, or the banter of hoboës around the yards. Diseased willows sagged over the muddy river; slops gushed into it from pipes. Along Main Street there was a composite odour of groceries, and stale beer, and malt from the brewery. Farm-horses were tied to gnawed posts. All the faces in the street were torpid, with a flicker of greed, appetite, or mockery. Dan put his mare in a stinking livery stable; there were pale boys, and fat men on stools or tilted chairs, jetting tobacco spit; he did not listen to their stories, or join in their cold laughter. Farm-hands and loafers crowded the saloons; occasionally one came out staggering. In the barns and outhouses behind them there was a dimness and an evil solitude, into which certain men kept wandering away, now singly, now in groups. There was an atmosphere of jokes, and fatigue, and corruption. Above the river and above Main Street, residence streets straggled over little hills, forming the town: skeletons of arbours, trellises, mulched gardens, geometric and firm, diminishing wood-piles and the

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chips, the gilt buckle in the grass, the bleak children, the widows, glittering tin tubs, the beagles and curs, the dead cat, a shower and a rainbow.

These things met the boy's morose eyes. But there burned in them the faint fire of a determination to discover beauty; and he ignored them. The fantastic loveliness in his mind ceaselessly sought its counterpart in reality. His ideal love hunted its embodiment. The town was an arid hunting-ground.

The young men in long pants—some red, some sallow, some strong, and some sickly—crowded on the cement steps and iron railing of the high school. When the teachers walked through them, they turned their faces gloomily aside. Then their loud talk would start up again: a quarrelsome discussion of athletics, or chaffing of one or the other about a girl, or the appraisal of a fob or a knife, with an occasional interchange between two of the older or more aggressive ones, in a lower key, of indecent anecdotes.

When a girl, or a group of girls with their arms about each other's waists, went into the building, to laugh and whisper in the cloak-room till the bells rang, they were silent again, but with a different embarrassment. They tightened their ranks—the rough hand of one resting on the shoulder of another—and stared heavily at the representatives of the mystery they had fathomed, or were about

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to fathom. Then a series of jokes would rise, with a note of discomfort or despair in certain voices.

They no longer tried to bully or make fun of Dan. When he had returned to school the previous autumn, they had recognized his new bearing, granted him a vague respect. But friendship among them rose out of a sharing of knowledge about sex, a community of experiment with it. Too conscious of its obscurity to face it alone, to face it in a loose herd was the law of their existence. Dan, being both timid and haughty, broke that law. They prejudiced the girls against him.

There was one whom he liked and who seemed to like him. Her name was Phyllis Dunham. One day she said, "My mother would like to meet you. Will you come to dinner on Tuesday?"

Her father was a lawyer, a little man who seemed indifferent to everything. He admitted that if he had succeeded in his profession in Chicago, he would never have returned to Rockhill, where he was born. He could live comfortably and enjoy a certain amount of leisure in the small town; he could live meanly and work from morning till night in the city. He said, "I made a wry face, and took my medicine." In his perpetual smile, there was a suggestion of resentment, almost of anger.

Mrs. Dunham was grey-haired and thin. Her face was like the face of a beautiful girl who has

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been ill for a long time. She said to Dan, as she lit a cigarette, "You don't mind my smoking. I am afraid to correct my bad habits for fear I should ruin my temper. However, I believe that even in the country very old women are allowed to smoke. I know I never saw my husband's grandmother without her pipe. I am almost that old—old enough at least for a cigarette."

She sat on the porch, wrapped up in a steamer-rug, for the April afternoons were cold. "Phyllis, if you will be good enough to sit where you can't be seen from the street, so that I shan't have to listen to a deputation of my upright neighbours to-morrow, who will beg me not to debauch my own child, you may have one too." They sat there smoking until Mr. Dunham came home, and then went in to dinner.

"I wanted to see you," Mrs. Dunham said. "I always like to know children who are clever at school. Not because I think that's of much use; if I find they are studying because they like it, I soon tire of them; but it usually means that they don't like something else."

Tired of the poignance and shrouded fierceness of the country spring, and of the melancholy of his family, Dan was pleased by her fluent, witty talk. Day after day, he lingered on her verandah after school.

Phyllis had a dark boyish beauty. Her forehead

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curved down over her grey eyes, so that they seemed hooded. Her skin was brown, with dead-rose on the cheeks. Her laughter made him think of the cry of a water-bird. Was he in love with her? He wondered at his lack of warmth, but decided that he was too reflective to experience an abrupt and ravishing emotion.

In the twilight, he saw a soft, pink fire; some children were burning a box. The flames trembled with a semblance of indolence. The smoke went up in many small drops, like the inverted reflection of a stream of water, falling slowly, falling upward; or it mounted in transparent curls. The sky was yellow, with a pallor and a blush, like human skin. As he peered up into it, Mike's face floated between his mind and the sight of his eyes; and the bitterness of disappointment mingled with the sweet clarity of his memory.

There had been no news of Rosalia and Mike; no letter had come. All winter his aunt had sat by the window, staring at the bare fields, not weeping, her hands clenched. She never spoke of what had happened; it was as if she had no daughter; and for the first time in her life, she refused to see her neighbours. She would drive to visit her sister, rigidly upright in the buggy, her protuberant eyes on the road ahead; and after these visits, Dan's mother would weep. She fell ill with pneumonia in January; for two weeks they scarcely dared hope

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that she would live. She recovered, but had grown old; her hair was white, the white of straw. After her illness she resumed her work about the house without interest, like an old woman merely passing the time until her death.

Dan knew that his father and mother believed that this tragedy might have been averted, if they had known Rosalia's plans in time; his aunt Permelia and uncle Rob were never forgiven; and he was severely blamed for his share in the conspiracy of silence. His mother never reproached him openly; her resentment had turned into pity of his ignorance of life. One day she said, "Oh you children! I suppose some day your own children will break your hearts as you break ours. You will learn." She spoke sharply, as if she wanted life to revenge the suffering they had caused their parents.

This atmosphere of disappointment and veiled reproach was very bitter to him. With Mike's inexplicable neglect, it seemed to close that part of his life behind him. He wanted to forget it—to remember, and to carry out in his own experience, only what Mike had taught him. This increased his need of new relationships. Loneliness was less than ever tolerable, for once he had seen it end.

The spring grew soft. Up and down the moist roads tassels swung from many branches. The wind seemed to blow more delicately, lest it bruise

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or shatter innumerable petals. A faint perfume arose, even drifting into the houses.

On warm afternoons Phyllis and he went into the country for flowers, which they brought back to her mother. She talked of the city, of her friends there, of the theatre; he listened with excitement. She taught him to dance; and they went to parties together.

One night they left the brightly illuminated high school, and followed a certain street until it became a country road, and climbed over a fence. Phyllis walked with an impatient buoyance, swinging her arms like a boy. A fragment of moon hung from the top of the sky. The stars were big and soft. They went up a hill in a large meadow. They could not sit on the ground, for the grass was wet; but they found a large, flat rock.

There was a bright uneasiness in the girl's face. What did it mean? What should he take for granted? Dan thought of Mike, envying his ease, and wondering if he would think him stupid.

A flock of sheep slept nearby, under a tree. One or two held up their heads, and shifted their ears back and forth. The meadow was the colour of a moonstone. The grave radiance hung down in still, chiselled folds.

Phyllis sat with her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands. Dan was embarrassed. The still solitude seemed to ask something of him. He

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wanted to give and to withhold, not knowing how to give. But that was an old mood; it loosed over his mind the memory of all the years of his life in a great, monotonous flood; and he was weáry of it. He was eager for a fresh beauty of sensation, for another novel contact like his lost friendship. A current of yearning flowed toward the girl; but before it could be expressed, it was frozen into a mere self-conscious thought of yearning.

He took her hand. It lay loosely and indifferently in his hand; she still rested her chin on the other palm. He had thought that Mike's instruction would give him self-possession; now to his disappointment, to his surprise, he found himself utterly ignorant. His body was ignorant. He began to kiss her fingers, her wrist, and her arms; the skin was amazingly sweet, the flesh itself subtly moulded; but he was unwilling to be kissing them.

Without withdrawing her arm, Phyllis smiled and lifted her head. The small moon covered her cheeks with a shimmer like hoarfrost. "Look here, Dannie, old man. You don't need to do this. I fancy you don't want to very much. You think I expect it, or you have to in order to be a man. Don't be a silly boy."

Dan was amazed. Then, when he saw how affectionately, without malice or scorn, she looked at him, he felt an extraordinary tenderness—relief, humility, and gratitude, all mingled—the first spon-

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taneous emotion in his first wooing. He pressed her hand to his mouth.

For a moment her eyelids drooped; and like a moving shadow, a drowsy excitement passed across her face. "And Dannie dear," she whispered, "if we ever do want each other, it will be different. It will be much simpler . . ." She gave him a brief, light kiss. "Come on, let's go home."

On Easter Sunday his family, including his aunt and uncle, came to church in Rockhill. Under the garish memorial windows, the platform was banked with potted lilies—curled, alabaster petals and spindling leaves; from each flower the stamens had been removed, lest they stain the corolla. The young minister's sermon was full of practical applications; and Dan listened only to a few sentences.

His aunt also ignored the sermon. She seemed to brood upon another aspect of the day than the one which the company in the pews understood. As the service progressed large tears ran sluggishly over her eyelids into the depressions under her eyes. She dried them promptly, and pressed her black gloved hands against her shaking lips.

Why did she weep? Rosalia was not dead. Then he remembered that for her there was a kind of death in life—a moral death, compared with which death itself was terrorless. The boy felt impatient with her suffering; but she was so frail,

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and there was so much dignity and so humble a suggestion of fortitude in her face, that he forgot his impatience in pity. And he soon forgot her altogether, daydreaming of the resurrection.

Christ had been put away, dead and bruised, in a bed of stone. Over it silver lilies nodded; in the sky drooped pale green draperies of light; and languid women wandered here and there, and wept. He stirred in his sleep, and woke, and drifted forth. One of the women knelt before him; the boy dreamed that he also knelt, beside her.

Sin, expiation, and remorse never entered his mind. Christ was the spring, its most vivid symbol—buried like a seed, breaking the wet rock, and bursting the cold soil, rising up in its bewildering animation, shedding a faint, hot light.

They sang the last hymn. His aunt found the page, and stood up, letting the book sag in her hands as if it were too heavy to hold. The boy wondered at her endless mourning. It was spring; no one was dead; was that not enough for happiness? It was enough for him.

The cabinet organ panted through an introduction. The choir stood up. All the people sang:

“Christ the Lord is risen today-ay,  
Hallelujah!  
Sons of men and angels say-ay  
Hallelujah!”

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The simple voices, shrill or booming, with a huskiness of breath in the composite tone, rose and dragged and quickened jubilantly. The lilies seemed to tremble in the tumult.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the see-al;  
Christ has burst the gates of he-ell;  
Hallelujah!”

Only his aunt's eyes were still heavy with tears. All the dull faces were alight.

The congregation surged out on the sidewalk and dispersed. The sunlight was warm and abundant. Dandelions crowded the blunt grass. Over a picket-fence fruit-trees in bloom leaned magnificently. Stately birds dropped from branch to branch.

That afternoon Dan went to Milwaukee to visit his mother's brother. The doctor, and his wife and tall, spectacled daughter were very kind to him. He had not been in the city since his twelfth year; now he delighted in it. The countless, bewilderingly similar houses seemed to collect the enigma of countless lives into an enormous puzzle. All the women seemed beautiful, or beautifully dressed. All the men had an air of importance, and were hurrying to and from unknown tasks. The poor were picturesque; he heard foreign tongues. The little harbour represented all the

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harbours, all the seas; and on the empty bluffs above it stood old half-Indian Solomon Juneau and a stag in bronze, peering together toward the east.

The last night of his stay, his relatives were dining with friends; and about six o'clock he strolled down Wisconsin Avenue alone. The slanting, spotted sunlight fell on the pavement. There was an odour of horses, gasoline, and asphalt, sweetened by the perfume of hundreds of women, hurrying past him. Automobiles streamed toward the outskirts of the city. The droning street-cars were packed. At the street-corners giant policemen motioned to the traffic with white gloved hands, their faces very red in the evening light.

Later, the rhythm on the sidewalks changed: the hurrying became strolling. The women were dressed in lighter colours, and idled along in laughing groups. Men puffed deliberately at large cigars. Almost without knowing, Dan hunted among their faces for Mike's face; he did not dare to run the risk of disappointment by hoping to find it.

Larger automobiles appeared, some with chauffeurs, within which were women with paper-white faces in showy furs and drooping feathers. A girl who seemed to totter upon her high heels led two tiny, strutting Pomeranians. Dan felt the atmosphere of love, and shivered at every brushing sleeve, straining to withhold his emotion—not as one who will withhold it to the end, but as one who would

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give it presently in a great flood. He was in love with strangers, and felt a kind of mystery about himself. One who had never seen him before, he felt, would know in him the man he was going to be, not the boy he had been. He feared no one in these crowds; he had not known there could be so much laughter.

The street-lamps were lit, diminishing behind him and before him. At last he was downtown, among the theatres and loud restaurants and shops. The unlighted office buildings towered cumbrously up to the sky, where here and there appeared a little star shaped like a rose. He lingered in front of shop-windows, contrasting their contents and the life they implied with the strict simplicity of his home.

A girl walked up close to him, and said, "Aren't you lonesome, country kid?"

He mumbled, "I guess not . . . Good evening."

Then he remembered: she was a prostitute. She wore a tight white dress and a slightly wilted straw hat with small vague flowers, and carried a parasol. Her eyes were overshadowed; but the strong light exaggerated her broad nostrils and lips. Her face was heavily powdered and brightly rouged.

What should he do? He was ashamed to retreat from the encounter he had vaguely desired. So when he moved on and she followed, he made no

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sign of displeasure. He asked, "How did you know I was from the country?"

Her voice was coarse and sharp. "I saw yuh must be; yuh looked so happy, with nothin' to do."

They crossed the bridge in the direction of the lake, saying nothing. The dim clock of the Northwestern station was ahead. The slow, moist breath of the lake pressed against their faces, carrying puffs of mist.

Dan was trying to think—struggling with the obscurity of his emotion, trying to recognize it. But his excitement clouded his thought. He walked along, not planning, or even anticipating.

They climbed up to the narrow park on the bluff, and found a bench. The city was behind them, tall and dim, murmuring, with the occasional sound of a street-car going up a grade, like the ascending note of a great stringed instrument. Below them Lake Michigan lay; it looked like a blank, black wall—darkness rearing up heavily from nowhere to the top of the sky, studded with minute, red, yellow, and green lights.

The girl pressed his hand, and tried to insinuate herself into his arms. He was aware of her insistence, but too dismayed by the tremendous darkness to do anything but stare into it.

The Northwestern tracks lay at the foot of the bluff. A locomotive stood there, panting hoarsely.

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From its smokestack streamed a flood of smoke and steam, revealed by the great sparks it bore, which tumbled, and tossed, and shot upward, and went out. The locomotive breathed; there was a sound like a dull bell in its iron body. Dan waited for it to move.

He began to think of Mike. His desire to see him again rose abruptly, to trouble him, to shut him up in the solitude of himself. Forgetting where he was, he sank into a futile retrospect, and puzzled over the enigma of their separation. He felt like a child again, homesick and not knowing what was his home.

There was a sonorous clanking in the locomotive. Then, very suddenly, a flaming light burst out of it. The fireman had opened the furnace to put in fuel. He stood embedded in the blaze which poured up from the coals, the blaze in turn embedded in the night. He was naked to the waist. In the red brightness he looked larger than any man. His colossal body, all woven over with great muscles, was blood-gold. He stooped, plunged his shovel into the coal, rose, and poured it in the furnace.

Dan breathed heavily. The girl dropped his hand. Then the man was swallowed up in the darkness. The door of the furnace had closed. There was nothing but darkness.

The boy's mind, his body itself, were shaken by a

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curious tumult. There was pain in it; but it was joy nevertheless. What it meant, he did not know; he did not care. He was possessed by a mysterious impatience: he must be alone, the night must pass.

The girl complained, "What's the matter with you, kid?"

He rejected her harshly, but without resentment, almost absent-mindedly. How could he leave her? What should he say?

"I don't know anything about women," he muttered.

"You'll learn, kid. You'll learn."

He stood up. She clutched at his sleeve. "Not tonight," he said fiercely. "Not tonight."

She did not follow him.

## 2. MARSH BURIAL

**T**HERE was a little man in the Beeler neighborhood named Tim Riley. He was very short and bow-legged, with a grey tuft on his bald forehead, and large hands almost always bandaged at one point or another with dirty rags. His sallow face was mild, though often flustered. He lived in a shack on the marsh road with his sister Lizzie, a querulous woman no bigger than he. They owned a small farm, but let it be overrun by weeds, cultivating only the sickly garden. Tim made a living at odd jobs and by hunting and trapping, in and out of season. He was a good man, though occasionally getting drunk, quavering the popular songs of twenty years ago, and forgetting where he lived. He regretted these backslidings bitterly, for he and Lizzie had once been converted at a camp-meeting, and had remained very religious. As he wandered up and down the country with his harmless looking gun, his face wore an expression of hungry humility.

He worshipped Selma. His wife had died in child-birth; and he and Lizzie had brought the dull, anaemic child, whom they called Molly. She grew

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more and more weakly, and lost weight as she grew tall. When she was fourteen Tim began to worry. One day a farmer, scolding him for some neglect, shouted, "Why you're too lazy to feed your own daughter!" Tim waddled away down the road, dazed and wretched. It burst upon him then that Molly was sick because she needed richer food than Lizzie cooked, a warmer house than the shack, a better living than he had provided. He was beside himself. Day after day he stumbled over the country like a mad man, sniffing, rubbing his forehead with a dirty bandana, grinding his three or four tobacco-stained teeth, and shooting at the rabbits long after they were gone.

Then one day Selma came to the shack. She said she wanted a girl to help her a little around the house; could they spare Molly? It would be very light work. Tim knew what she meant, and wept in the excess of his gratitude. For six months Selma took care of the girl. It was too late; she caught a severe cold, went home; pneumonia developed; and she died. After that the little man wanted to be nothing but Selma's slave. As he poked dismally from trap to trap or went out hunting, he tried to think what he could do for her; but she never needed anything he had to give.

The Saturday after Dan's return from Milwaukee, his uncle asked him to help him move some

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baled hay out of a loft in the barn. Dan went up into the loft, pulled the bales to the edge, and lowered them on a rope to a hayrack standing below, where Jule piled them up. A horse and buggy came into the yard; and Jule got down to see who it was.

Tim Riley came in, irresolutely, as if at any moment he might turn and run. He looked as he had looked when Molly died. Jule saw that something was wrong. "What's the matter?"

The little man stammered and choked. At last he said, in a trembling voice, "I found—Rosalia—Your girl is over there in the marsh. I found her. Dead."

Dan turned dizzily. Everything went black. He supported himself against the hay. He must hear. He must see. Transfixed with horror, he stared down at the barn-floor.

Jule crouched on a box. He sat there in the sunlight. He had covered his face with his hands; it was greenish white between the large brown fingers. Tim stood in the middle of the floor, bent and extremely small. There was a dead silence. The boy's heart missed a beat, and thundered, and missed another beat.

Jule dropped his hands from his twisted, rigid face. When he spoke, his voice was loud and dull. "Where is she?"

Tim cowered, "Down yonder. Where the bad

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place in the marsh is. By the big sink-hole. She's there."

"How do you know it's her? It's been so long," Jule asked fiercely.

"She had a hat with a green feather. I saw it. She had a ring marked R," he insisted.

Dan clung to the bales, and gritted his teeth. Jule stared at the little man with a horrible fascination. "How did you find it? Why hadn't anybody before?"

Tim said, "I wanted to find out—what it was. I was huntin'. Every day there was—I kept seein' a lot of crows."

Jule shuddered.

"Nobody could get there where she is. That bad place. You know. I had to cut a lot of saplin's. I threw 'em down, and walked on 'em."

Jule stood up. He staggered, and gathered himself together with a visible effort. "Well," he said, "it will kill my wife." He paused, his mouth twitching. "Tim, d'you think . . . Tim, my wife has been good to you."

Tears came to the little man's eyes. He tried to speak and failed.

"That's all right," Jule muttered.

Dan, listening from the loft, realized that his uncle had forgotten his presence. He must say something; he did not know what to say. He started down the ladder; he was so weak that his

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feet slipped from the rungs, and he jumped to the floor.

His uncle turned heavily around. "I forgot you were there." The look on his face made the boy cringe; he wanted to run away. "Too bad," Jule said.

Then he went on, speaking to both of them. "It would kill your aunt. We'll have to bury Rosalia—out there. It would surely kill her mother." He breathed as if he were suffocating. "If either of you tell a living soul. . . ." His mouth tightened with a frightful expression of scorn. "Well . . . You'll be the ones who'll kill her."

They stood in the sunlight on the barn-floor. There was a bird singing. Jule stared ahead intently. They seemed to be waiting for something. It was a nightmare; the boy struggled to awake.

Then Jule said, "We'll take shovels. Get them, Tim. And your horse." The little man went out. Jule turned to the boy. "Dannie, go to the house. Tell your a aunt that some of our cattle have got into the big marsh. We're going after them. Call to her. Don't go where she can see you. She'd know from your face. Then you can go home."

Dan said, "I'm coming with you."

"No. I don't want you to. You mustn't."

The boy trembled from head to foot; but his eyes met Jule's without flinching. "Yes, I'm coming."

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"No," Jule repeated huskily. They stared at each other. "All right." Jule dropped his eyes. For the first time his hard, dead voice shook. "I guess I'll need you."

Dan walked across the lawn, and called loudly to his aunt. They got into Tim's buggy. As they drove away, she came out on the porch and waved to them. "Come back for dinner," she called. Tim averted his watery eyes. Jule waved; it was as if a dying man lifted a dead hand.

They did not speak. The little man sniffed helplessly. Jule muttered, "Don't." He looked as if he would never weep, as if his face would never stir. The boy was stupefied. Tim held the stub of a whip in his hand, and struck the mare's sunken back whenever she began to walk. She shambled along; the buggy rattled loudly.

The country was all luminous, careless beauty. Far down every valley, minute trees were like potted ferns. The leaves along the road had clear outlines and bright surfaces. Drenched violets clustered and nodded. Bobolinks flew up with their pure, drunken music.

Meanwhile they were going out, in the old buggy that seemed about to collapse, to bury Rosalia. Dan gritted his teeth to keep them from chattering.

Jule fixed his eyes on the road immediately ahead. The boy stared distractedly at the spectacle streaming past on either side. An overgrown boy sang as

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he led a pair of black colts to water. Two little girls sat weaving dandelion chains. A flock of geese held up their serpentine necks, and made a procession over a lawn.

There was no sign of death—only sunshine and mocking beauty. But they knew better. There was a dead girl. Unburied, and dead how long? Dan counted the months: December, January, February, March, April. . . . He remembered the crows. The buggy shook. He felt sick.

Dan opened a gate; they turned down the familiar lane. The forest smelled like rotting fruit. The foliage trembled in tall, transparent towers, with a hollow of air between leaf and leaf. It was warm; but out of the shadows a chill rose like a weak jet of water. The cobwebs lay beaded with dew. Here and there on the littered ground a plant stood out sharply, or a milky flower nodded.

The old buggy shuddered as it went over boulders. On the steep incline the mare resisted its weight; the thills pushed forward on either side of her neck; the hold-backs cut into her legs; her hoofs slid in the wet soil. Jule betrayed an extreme nervousness. His fingers twitched up and down a seam; he bit his colourless lips.

The heat of the sunlight, the wet chill of the shadows increased as they descended. Even the sunken marsh was alive; life burned over it in acre after acre of green flame.

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They came to the clearing. The old hawthorn was putting forth its leaves. There was a sunny silence around it in which it seemed that no wrong could take place, nor anything ever die. The boy wished that he could die there, rather than go the little way they had still to go.

Tim drew up beside a tree that stood alone. They got out. Jule started into the marsh, but remembered that he didn't know where to go. Tim tied his mare to the trunk. "It's this way," he said.

They set out, following the little man, who carried the shovels. Jule walked with a stoop and often stumbled. They chose the ridges of solid ground, and jumped from log to root, from root to log. They sank in the mire, waded up to their knees in water. Dan was afraid that he would fall in utter exhaustion; he was cold with fear.

Skunk-cabbages were everywhere, fleshy and brilliantly mottled. Fresh grass grew in water; last year's grass lay in water, hairy strand upon strand. Bright slime floated on many pools. They skirted dangerous mires. Livid gouts of gum oozed from the scabby bark of the tamaracks. There were flowers coloured like a snake, yellow and green.

They came to the quick-sand, and crossed on the saplings which Tim had thrown down. The pale, trembling muck crept up over their feet. Dense forest lay beyond it, through which they made their way.

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"There it is," Tim said. Everything that Dan saw throbbed with his pulse. They went a few feet farther. Tim threw down the shovels.

They stood in a grotto of tamaracks. The sunlight fell through little holes in the rough branches. Two large trees stood close together. Between them there was a bare space. Gnats and glittering bluebottles swarmed over it. There was the body. The hat with the green feather lay on the ground. A few shreds of cloth and a belt were there.

Dan turned faint and sick. He dropped down on a wet log, and covered his mouth with his hands. His body shook in a convulsion of horror.

Jule strode away between the trees.

The boy sobbed, almost without emotion; it was a physical sickness. Time passed. The horror increased—and broke, like a scream when the throat can endure no more. It was over. A strange dullness overcame him. His flesh tingled. He looked up.

There was the little corpse. The green feather trembled slightly in a breeze which also made the boughs sway with dreadful delicacy and indolence. Tim squatted at the other end of the long, rotting log. His uncle appeared between the trees, shrunken and feeble looking, his skin the colour of the mushrooms which clustered along the log. His face was still distorted and taut—not like the face of one who has wept.

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Tim stood up. They walked around the body as if they feared it. Jule said, "Where are the clothes?" The words made a very low, croaking sound. He did not seem to hope that the body was not his daughter's; but it was a parody of hope.

"The dogs," Tim muttered, shrinking as though he expected to be struck.

They took up the shovels. Where they first began to dig, the soil was too wet. When they had cleared away the deep moss, needles, and twigs, water came to the surface. The muck as black as coal-tar flattened sluggishly; the edges caved in. The ground was too soft to hold the shape of a grave, or even a shallow excavation. Jule worked with heedless violence, though the hollows made by the shovel filled immediately with water, and the mud slid back.

"No use," Tim said. "We can't dig it here."

Jule stared at what they had done as if he had not seen it before. "We'll have to find a rise of ground," he said.

They walked about in various directions until Tim called, "I guess here is better." At the foot of an old tree there was a low ridge. Other trees crowded about. Where the sun fell, bunches of grass grew; in the shadows the naked loam was sprinkled with needles.

There they dug a grave—a hole that would do

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for a grave. Tim went back to the buggy for an axe to chop the tough, hairy roots.

The air was exhausted by the abundant vegetation, acrid with the odour of inseparable growth and rotting. They panted as they worked. The sweat of plants made the heat clammy. Over miles of swamp the hissing of insects rose.

Jule's face was grey. "Sit down. Rest," they said to him. He sank upon a great protuberant root, and covered his face with his hands.

Dan worked frantically. Tears blinded him; then his eyes would be suddenly scorched and dry; and the burning of the eyeballs would start the tears again. Both tears and sweat trickled down his face. Little flies tormented him. He felt the nausea, the indifference, the stupidity of despair. He had only one desire—to lose consciousness, and never wake. He grew so dizzy that he had to lie down. The piece of sky over him was bright and blank. The uneasy branches, like hairy hands, choked it. Life was intolerable.

Finally there was a little, adequate hole under the tree. The severed roots hung into it, festooned with drab rootlets. Jule said, "Dan, go back to the buggy, and bring that old horse-blanket. And bring the tie-rope. I'll get you another, Tim."

Dan stumbled, sank in the mire, and ran wherever he could. He returned. The blanket was torn, covered with hair, discoloured by sweat; it

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smelled strongly of horses. They gathered the body into it, with the hat and scraps of cloth, and bound it with the rope. Jule and Tim carried it carefully, and placed it in the grave, which was scarcely large enough. Then they shovelled in the dirt.

When the dismembered roots had been stamped in, and the dirt was all piled in a mound, Jule knelt beside the grave. It was the attitude of prayer; but Dan saw that his dry eyes were not closed; they shifted vacantly, hopelessly over the ground.

He rose. Tim picked up the shovels. They started home—Jule stumbling, not looking where he went, but with his head turned and his eyes fixed, over his shoulder, on the place they were leaving.

### 3. THE FULL BLACK SUMMER

**D**AN was sick. What he had seen haunted him—dead and torn apart. And waking and sleeping, there was an abyss in which a blood-red man writhed and stretched out endless arms. He could not eat; his head throbbed; his sleep was broken by nightmares.

His mother was alarmed; but his condition resembled an ordinary illness. He feared her anxiety, her desire to understand, and deliberately misled her. At the end of three days he recovered from the physical shock.

He hated Mike and all that he had meant, and determined to obliterate from his memory every trace of him. As he struggled with the images in his mind, and the long treasured words, and the echoes of emotion, they grew strong—deformed parts of himself, to be stifled, to be mutilated, to be killed. Mike's laughing philosophy, his exaltation of sensuality, his evil love of life, his poetry—their fruit was a little rotting body, bundled together in a horse-blanket. The dimmest recollection of Mike's appearance produced nausea, faintness, and the tingling of fear. Dan was pursued by the eyes,

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the mouth, the voice, the laughter, the freckled cheeks, the long arms, the brown fingers which had killed Rosalia, and like a hunted animal fled from his own memory.

His thoughts went around and around, around and around: Mike had come, seen her beauty, desired her, taken her, satisfied himself, run away (perhaps left her pregnant); in despair she had killed herself. Mike had come, seen her beauty, desired her, taken her. . . . Something chattered the words in his mind.

There was another sequence, equally vicious: Mike had come, been his friend, mocked his religion, taught him evil; he had believed, been happy, tried to seduce a girl, tried to take a prostitute, seen Rosalia's body torn by dogs, buried it in a hole in the swamp.

He dreamed of killing Mike. He struck him again and again with a hoe. Mike never ceased smiling. When he was dead, Dan sobbed, and tried to wake him and close the unnaturally wide wounds.

His hatred shifted from Mike to himself. He had regarded the lowest of men with envy. Animals had excited and fascinated him. He had abandoned his faith under Mike's facile mockery. He had let his mind be corrupted without a struggle—had hungered for corruption. He had accepted, even taken pleasure in Mike's opinions, degrading men below the level of animals, making a god of

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impurity. He had believed, had worshipped by his affection for Mike. He had looked on while Mike debauched Rosalia, revelling meanwhile in his own excitement. When Mike left, he had kept up an illusion for his sake. He had hid from his parents knowledge that might have saved her—he too had killed her.

It was wrong to spend his hatred upon Mike. Mike did not matter, did not exist. He himself was its proper object. Spiritual degradation had taken place in him; from physical degradation he had been protected only by accident and his own irresolution. But he judged and condemned himself by his intention.

Night after night he tried to pray, throwing himself on the floor by his bed, burying his face, often sobbing. But the flood of remorse was frozen. His spirit was torpid; or there would surge up a mass of fragments of memory—unwelcome, confused, and meaningless. Mike's body danced in his closed eyes. He could not focus his repentance; to concentrate upon his transgressions inevitably woke the yearnings with which they were allied. Voluptuous images folded him in a hot cloud.

In these moments of exhaustion, languor would drug his sorrow and suffuse his mind. Phyllis or a nonexistent girl with a boy's slenderness would insinuate herself, very wistfully, into his imaginary

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embrace. He would fall asleep, conquered, but in utter despair.

Later he would upbraid himself, torture himself, threaten himself with suicide. He wished that he might be emasculated and clean of the stain, the degradation of his life.

He tried to recover his religious faith and his idealism. Looking back, out of this wretchedness, his melancholy childhood seemed all radiance and ease. But he could not return. Mike had done his work well.

*Your body is a temple, the temple of the spirit;* it was a mocking lie. For he knew that the passions which had poisoned his life (which had killed Rosalia) were within his flesh—housed there, still there, natural to it.

So miserable that a night seemed everlasting, he could not be comforted by a heaven of reward; and moral virtue was nothing but a feeble reflection on earth of its dubious beauty in the imagination. The hell of punishment meant as little; it was a feeble reflection in the imagination of the torment on earth. He tried, in a frenzy of remorse, to increase his suffering by prefiguring the penalties of eternity, but found in them not increase but assuagement. Burning and desolation—what were they beside the sight of Rosalia's body as it lay in the swamp? Nothing.

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The faith of his childhood was less a refuge than a mockery. There was no refuge. He was like a wounded animal; and a clear, withering sun stiffened its wounds. Thus, as his hatred of Mike had turned to hatred of himself, his hatred of himself turned to hatred of life. He lived in an utter, miserable solitude. Those around him might have been shadows.

He went back to Rockhill and finished the year at school. When he was free, he went immediately to his room, and sat by the window with a book, scarcely turning the pages.

Occasionally an extreme restlessness drove him out, to walk up and down nervously. The life of the place disgusted him. In the stagnant atmosphere, now that the evenings were warm, an insidious excitement arose. He shrank from it, trying now to forget that he had once tried to share it. The girls tittered; the boys sat on rows of boxes and chairs on the sidewalk, mumbling jokes and snickering. The faces glimmered sickly in the twilight; and over their vacant surfaces shame and appetite shifted, as one after another or two by two they disappeared, leaving the streets empty.

One night he wandered half-heartedly into the cemetery, in order to be alone. It lay shrouded by immense trees, the branches drooping and swaying; and the slabs of stone stood in ranks of rigid

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ghosts. He was strolling about, thinking of the evenly spaced bodies decaying or decayed under the thick grass, when suddenly he saw two prostrate figures under a tree. Cold with horror, he turned back; but before he reached the gate, startled voices revealed the presence of other lovers. Drops of sweat gathered on his forehead; he rushed home, knowing that only one thing—to kill, kill, kill, ending with himself—would express his emotion.

He avoided the Dunhams. He was ashamed to see Phyllis; and they were obscurely associated in his mind with worldliness and evil. Now their charm had an ominous implication; and he was in no mood to enjoy their clever talk. He declined one invitation to dinner, saying that his head ached, and declined another because he had to study. He knew that Phyllis recognized his insincerity. One day she said bluntly, "Dannie, what ails you? You are as glum as a widow."

He flushed. "I'm all right."

"Indeed you're not. I suppose something abominable has happened in the country. At any rate, we miss you. Mother complains bitterly."

"No, nothing has happened. I'm working hard. . . ."

"Don't say that again. I know it's nonsense."

Dan surrendered. "I am unhappy," he muttered. "I can't explain. I'm sorry. You've been so kind to me."

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"I wish we were the friends you'd come to when you're in trouble, not the ones you run away from," she said as she left him.

That night he cried, pressing his face into the pillow lest someone in the next room hear him.

He took his examinations, finding a certain relief in mental drudgery, and went through the formalities of graduation without interest. He gathered up his books and went home.

His mother's face still wore an expression of reproach and disappointment. The summer work was like the crisis of an illness; and as the strain increased, his father's hostility grew sharp and strained. He ignored his son, expressing his feeling only by rigorous exactions.

Dan seldom saw his aunt and uncle. She grew visibly thinner; her life seemed to concentrate more and more, in an ominous reticence. Immediately after the discovery of Rosalia, Jule had gone to his brother-in-law in Milwaukee for a physical examination. Dan supposed he wanted to be away from his wife for a few days, in order not to arouse her suspicion. When he came back, he said there was nothing to fear; he had been working too hard; and he hired another man.

By the end of June, Wisconsin was a furnace. The crops suffered from the drought. They had to water the garden from buckets and tubs. The soil

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caked, and when they cultivated the corn, broke up in large grey chunks. Thistles flourished in the stunted grain, and bloomed like burning jets of gas.

Men and animals moved with a sickly langour, as if under the influence of a drug. No one could sleep indoors; people brought out blankets and mattresses, and lay tossing on the porches and lawns. On some faces appeared a stifled bitterness; feeble resignation weakened others.

Many children died of summer sickness. Dan saw the youngest Bruter child, lifted in its mother's arms on a pillow, because it seemed too weak to touch. They had to bend over the little bluish and sallow body to be sure that it still breathed.

The inflamed light had a gruesome splendour. Its source, the sun, reeled across the zenith and staggered away in the dead hills. At noon the sky was the colour of tallow.

From the hill-tops Dan saw the swamp: the terrible multitudes of trees, the bloated thickets, the stubs, the streaming grasses. Here and there cattle looked embedded in the green and brass, and the black and blue shadows. To the boy it was an enormous grave, a bizarre grave, heaped with dead, everlasting flowers. A paroxysm of abhorrence overwhelmed him.

The leathery hickory leaves were coated with dust; and on both surfaces the fruit of a blight

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ripened—ornate eruptions, some nipple-shaped, some like blisters, pink, green, and liver-coloured. Flowers spread their brilliant gullets. Dan had to bury a dead hen covered with maggots in a manure-pile.

The elaborate vegetation had a gross, charnel beauty. Under its actual greens and yellows, the boy detected blackness. In spite of the florid surface, it was a black land. A black land being consumed by fire—slime-green tongues, and fetid smoke in the shape of flowers.

Sometimes thunderheads rolled into the sky, trembling cumbrously. They had great marred faces, grey and cotton-white. Lightning jetted out of them, cutting a rift in the heat; and cool, acrid water gushed. Dan felt an obscure pleasure as the flood deformed the leaves, lodged the grain, washed bare many roots, obliterated all but a little of the coarse landscape, and the hens oiled their feathers and stood under the rose-bushes.

But inevitably the burning summer closed over the rift as if it had not been. In crude vistas the fertile country lay open, already dried and scarred—under the heat-waves and the hard sky, over which passed gaunt hawks and little weary birds. The ripening of the grain resembled a yellow blight. At night sheet-lightning spread and collapsed on the horizon.

Sullen and worn, Dan worked all summer. He

## THE FULL BLACK SUMMER

got up at five-thirty, milked four cows, fed and watered the horses, breakfasted, went into the fields—to mow, rake, cock, scatter, and haul in the hay, to hoe, to weed, to cultivate—ate dinner, cleaned out the stables, returned to the fields, came in about five, mixed slop for the hogs and fed them, ate supper, milked again, and toward nine went to bed, stupefied with fatigue. The stables choked him; he shrank from the glare of the fields. He found some distraction from his unhappiness in the intense labour, a partial peace in exhaustion; but worked without interest, and often forgot things he had to do. His father thought that he shirked his duties.

Meanwhile his sorrow did not relax. No one penetrated his solitude. He was tired of the spectres, tired of their names, tired of the pictures in his memory. They were in himself; he could not run away from them. His fatigue was tinged with horror and fright. It exposed him to extremes of imaginary salacity, extremes of remorse. How could he make peace with himself? Would he never cease to be tossed back and forth between craving and repentance? His hope of a solution weakened. But there remained a yearning that resembled hope—hope that help would come from some source, that some interpretation would be given, and his misery be cleared away. Often it seemed a mockery of himself by himself.

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

He grew taller, but lost fifteen pounds in weight.

By the time they began to harvest the grain, he had reached a point where no more acute suffering was possible—no more shame, no more hatred of Mike, no more fear, no more mourning for Rosalia, scarcely any more regret. His mind filled with the peace of enervation. He could not understand. He could not judge. He could make no resolutions. It was all that he could do to exist.

#### 4. PRIMITIVE

**I**N August there was a solemn sound—the many harvesters throbbing—over the land as the wheat, rye, and barley were cut. The belted sheaves fell heavily in the stubble. The bundles of rodlike straw, the leaves caught in the butts, the bearded heads had a sameness and a sumptuous beauty. The men took one in each arm and stood them up together, and leaned other pairs against them, and spread out the heads of another for a cap—often pausing to drink from a large pearl-white jug inside a shock. Their sunburned arms, pricked by the sharp straw, were mottled with little sores of a darker red.

The dogs lay in the shadow of the shocks, lolling out their tongues. Sometimes the reaper would start a rabbit, which the excited dogs would drive back into the uncut grain; and if a dog followed, the men shouted, and the man on the reaper would drive slowly lest he mutilate its legs. Or nests of field-mice would be uncovered; and the dogs would snap in their teeth the blind, pink young.

Many fields adjoined forests; and the low boughs had to be lifted over the great fans which folded the

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

grain upon the sickles. When the sun was low, the fields lay in banks of trees like yellow, rectangular lakes, on which the reapers drifted ponderously back and forth.

In the middle of the harvest Selma died. An organic illness had undermined her strength; and as she looked from her bed across the fields, she seemed unbearably weary of what she saw. During the three days' illness Dan stayed at the grey house to help with the chores. He was sitting in the parlour when Jule came out of the bed-room, and said, "It can't go on much longer. I'm going to telephone your mother."

He went back. Dan stood by the window. The sun was going down. The pond throbbed, glassy and wan. In many fields shocks stooped over pale blue shadows. There were ducks gathering up bits of food out of the gravel; one rose, and with its neck and wings made a crooked cross.

Jule came slowly out of the bed-room. She was dead—Dan knew it. His face wore a clear, strange expression of relief. "She is better off now," he said. "The world was no place for her. At least not any more."

Dan thought, Now she will never find out what happened to Rosalia; he will not be afraid now. The thought was like a cry of pain heard at a distance. But the cruelty of life was no longer his concern. He had acknowledged it; he had been pros-

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trate before it. Now, in his weariness, he was scarcely aware that there was such a thing as injustice, or such a thing as life. He left his uncle standing by the window, with that emphatic look of relief—almost an appearance of joy—on his face, and went to meet his mother, who had driven up to the door.

All the farmers interrupted the pressing work of harvest to attend Mrs. Bier's funeral. She had occupied a double preëminence in the community: a woman of stern virtue and warm charity, and one whose life had been a series of obscure events (the subjects of gossip year after year) through which she had passed unchanged—worn, but still proud, and always inscrutable. The most sluggish imaginations had responded in a measure to the enigma. There was a great crowd of men and women, some almost strangers, at the funeral. The young minister appeared to have heard nothing of the tragedy which had closely preceded her death, and delivered a powerful sermon on the rewards of a saintly life, picturing the joy in heaven and the awe upon earth at her putting off mortal to put on immortal flesh.

A week after the funeral, Jule came to Hill Farm and found Dan and his father and mother at supper. "John," he said, "I'd like to trade hired men with you. Don't mean your Polack; don't want him. I mean Dan. I'm willing to bet he's not much good

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to you, as a hired man. I've been noticing—he looks a little green round the gills. Mind, I'm not saying you're working him too hard, but you need a reg'lar man just now. Now I've not much work. I'm paying my man for real work; he's not working; he'd just as soon."

No one seemed to know what to say. Dan stared at his uncle with bewilderment and a sensation of alarm of which he knew he would not be able to speak.

"You see," Jule went on, "I'm lonesome. I know Dan's no blood of mine. . . ." He looked up at Theodora humbly, as if he remembered at that moment that he did not belong to her family—at least he did not belong any more—and had always been to a certain extent an outcast. "But at any rate, he's more to me than that ox of a hired man. I haven't much of a family left."

Without bending her head, Dan's mother began to weep. His father said, "Well, Dan, would you like to do it?"

Dan answered, "Yes, I would." He felt that his father and mother did not want him to go, but could not object, and were compelled by pity of Jule's loneliness. He wondered if at bottom he himself dreaded going, and wondered why.

The first evening, as they sat on the porch, his uncle said, "You see, boy, I've seen a lot of life. And I'm not so dumb that I didn't know what you

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were up against. I let you come along the day we found Rosalia, and I've been ashamed of myself ever since."

He spoke with evident embarrassment. Dan felt a strange dread and a desire not to hear. They were silent for a time.

"We all have to go through about so much hell. So much does us good; too much is no use. When you're a kid, you're likely to get too much of it. Now I was partly to blame for your getting into this. It wasn't a thing for a boy. You've got thin; your eyes are as big as plums; first thing, you'll be sick. I thought, if we could talk it over, maybe you'd not take it so hard."

The shame which Dan had felt so long made itself felt as humility. There was one thing he must say. "But uncle Jule . . . I knew they were sweet-hearts. I didn't tell anybody, because I thought she was going to run away and get married. Maybe you could have saved her. Anyway, you're her father. I don't see why you should be sorry for me."

"Yes, I was her father. Maybe I wasn't much good at it." His face was like the face of an old man, that never winces. "Well, I guess you liked Mike. You loved Rosalia; everybody did. I guess it was hard enough on you. Anyway, I'm old; I can stand more. It's you sensitive children go to pieces.

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“Well, besides, I wanted some company. I couldn’t have stood it any more, with that dumb hired man around. I couldn’t pretend any more about it. I had enough of that while your aunt lived. Now I’ve got to have somebody around who knows what I know. Besides, I want to know more about what happened—I mean before Rosalia died. You’ve got to understand things, when there isn’t anything else you can do. I guess you know something about it. Maybe you’ll tell me, one of these days, when you get around to it.”

Dan slept in Rosalia’s bed-room. He was frightened and miserable. Evidently there was to be a reanimation of what was at an end—at an end but not dead, dead but not quiet in the grave. The routine of existence had begun to close over and make dim what he remembered. And now, was it to be roused and brought into the light? Was there never to be a chance to forget? He wanted to go on living in a stupor; something told him that if he did not, he would cease to live at all. He wished bitterly that he had stayed at home, and fell asleep thinking that the coming months would be like the previous months, with inquisition added to the forms of torment.

But he did not know Jule. Little by little his grim tranquillity mastered the boy. The events which had brought them together began to recede swiftly. The time in which they had occurred be-

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came simply a past time. That past time opened, like a very wide grave, to receive its ghosts, and give them rest, and cover them over with a melancholy dimness, and leave the living free.

The harvest went on laboriously around the man and the boy, doing little tasks. It was the second season that Jule had rented his fields. Dinner-bells and supper-bells rang plaintively from other houses. Over the marsh, during the rusty evenings, they heard the notes of cow-bells falling in clusters like small, smooth seeds from a pod.

The never harvested marsh had an appearance of harvest. All the bitter greens grew mellow. Autumn colours drifted over the tangled, fertile, but fruitless acres. These colours and the over-heavy, drooping forms were mournful; but there was no turbulence. One night the harvest moon pushed cumbrously out of its heart, and ascended, rough and orange, giving little light.

Jule would stand on the porch, and look across the pond and the great dim wilderness, with the air of a man beside a grave. Once Dan saw tears in his eyes; and he muttered, "Your aunt never said a word about Rosalia. Not a word, even when she died. She died like a childless woman."

Another day he asked, "What did you think of Mike? I liked him. Didn't you think he was a good fellow?"

Dan could not refuse to answer; but he could

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scarcely articulate in his embarrassment. "I liked him. I had never had a friend. He told me about sex. Nobody ever had. He had loose morals. He said animals lived beautifully, and moral people were hypocrites. He thought it was right to make love, even if you weren't married. I believed him. I couldn't help it. I didn't know any better. I'm ashamed now." His voice had grown weaker with each word; and he finished in a husky whisper.

Jule whittled a stick. After a while he said, "Well, boy, there's no use being ashamed. Besides, I guess Mike's morals were about as good as anybody's. Don't you believe life's what your mother told you it was.

"I guess people aren't very often to blame for what they do. I guess they do the best they can. Terrible things happen; that's all you can say; that's life. I guess Mike did the best he knew how.

"Now Dannie, if Mike was good to you, if he was the best friend you had, you stick to it. Very likely he was all right. It looks as if he did harm to Rosalia. But how do we know he was to blame for what happened?

"Rosalia was my girl; she was all I had. Dannie, I guess if I can say, 'Maybe he wasn't to blame,' I guess you can say it. You don't know what he was up against. You don't know—maybe he thought it was the best thing for her, to go away. No use, I tell you, blaming him."

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After a pause, he added, "One thing I want to know. What d'you think, was she going to have a baby?"

Dan said, "I don't know. No, I don't think so. I don't think he would have gone away then. Once he said it was all right to make love to a girl, but to go away and leave her if she was going to have a baby was the worst thing you could do."

"So," Jule said. "That's that. Mike liked you. I guess if he told you that, he meant it. So, maybe she wasn't with child at all. Or maybe he didn't know it."

Later he added, "So, you see, maybe it wasn't Mike's fault. I guess what is taught people, religion and morals and so on, are mostly to blame. Most people do as well as they can."

Dan gave in to a new master. As before, he did not know what he believed; he scarcely understood; but the mood of his imagination made it seem unnecessary to decide or to understand. The pain of solitude, the pain of the emotions experienced in solitude decreased; and he wondered vaguely if loneliness had not been the root of his past unhappiness, amazed that already he had begun to think of the unhappiness as past.

One day Jule said, "I'll tell you a story. It's mostly about me; anyway, everybody else in it is dead. Maybe you've heard some of it; some people talk about it."

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

He told the story of Han. It took all afternoon, as they worked about the barns; sometimes they sat down on a feed-box or a pair of milk-stools or the big stone by the shop, one talking and the other listening; and on several other afternoons he returned to it to add portions he had passed over or forgotten.

He seemed to tell it less for the boy than for himself, to reclaim his own youth by the telling. He lingered over each episode to discover and make clear the details with which his emotion had been associated, and thus to bring a ghostly counterpart of the emotion into being. Because of the irregularity of the narrative—anticipating itself, returning to explain, and becoming confused—Dan knew that he had never told it before. His eyes clouded, and brightened, and clouded again; but the sentences were formed steadily, eagerly, with a sombre satisfaction—as if at that moment he were taking possession of something he had lost and not expected to regain.

When he had finished Han stood, very strange and vivid, in the boy's mind. He might have known her, and forgotten, and remembered again. She looked like one who had never died, who never could be killed. Though Dan had seen her grave, he felt that she was not in it; surely the death of despair and dismay—the death he understood—had never

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brought her there. Then he realized that her life was like one of Mike's Greek myths.

The boy thought, How powerful a story is, and how by a kind of magic it compels the imagination; there was nothing in the world, it seemed to him, so mysteriously strong; and he began to wonder if he would ever have anything as beautiful to tell. He had forgotten its relation to the reality which had disappointed and tormented him; its teaching was inseparable from its narrative; and he accepted it as a dream which must fade and leave one as before—harassed, and weak, and lonely, in a meaningless world.

But Jule said, "Everybody, all you children, could learn a lot from Hannah. She knew the way to live." He paused, knotting his grey eyebrows. "If I'd married Hannah, if she'd been my girl's mother, it wouldn't have ended so. If Rosalia hadn't been afraid to tell her mother what was the matter, she wouldn't have gone out there in the marsh."

Tears ran out suddenly into the wrinkles around his eyes. But he would not stop; he would not cease to see, and perhaps for the first time, to tell what he saw. "What if she was going to have a baby? Maybe she wasn't. But anyway, why is that so terrible? Why couldn't she? It would have been all right. We've got plenty of money."

Then he seemed to feel that he was blaming his

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wife, and turned toward Dan insistently, as if he would force him to understand. "You know, boy, you know—I loved Selma. She was a good woman. She did her best. It killed her too. But Hannah understood better; she knew better how life is; that's all.

"I've lost all I've got. They're dead, that's all. And all for nothing, for nothing. I think it was all for nothing." He got up and walked away into the barn, and said no more that day.

Dan went to bed, feeling that the story was not finished; his uncle's emotion had broken it off. Jule did not come up to bed until after he was asleep; Dan heard his voice on the porch, and wondered who was there; but he was only talking to the cat.

The next day he said, "The trouble is, you all want something better than what there is. That's religion. Nothing on earth satisfies you. You think there's something finer. Religious people are always like that. They're never satisfied. Life's not perfect; it's everything altogether; we've got to make the best of it. They're all right when things go the way they'd like to have them; but they can't stand trouble. When they don't get what they want, they want to die. Selma was like that; your mother's like that, I guess; Rosalia was like that; maybe you are too.

"Hannah was different. She took what came. She never worried about what she'd done that she

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hadn't ought to. She never blamed anybody; she knew everybody did what they had to. She never thought things ought to be better than they were. When things went wrong, she stood it. She was always satisfied.

"Now she wouldn't have gone like Rosalia. And d'you know why Selma got sick and died? Because she couldn't stand it to have her girl run away with Mike. You know where Rosalia was. And if Rosalia hadn't been brought up so strict, she wouldn't have been there. What made her think it was such a disgrace that she had to run away and die?

"Maybe the old people were all more like Hannah. Maybe they're more like her in the old country. I don't know. I never was as good as Selma and your mother; I'm a German, and I'm not educated. Hannah was just a common woman; she never went to school. But I see all the fine people, the people with brains—they all go to pieces. I guess it's the kind of religion they've got here. Something's wrong; such things don't have to be."

Dan was happy at his uncle's house. Jule taught him about animals, how to breed them and treat their diseases. They went to the woods and the marsh; and Jule talked about wild birds and animals, and pointed out the herbs which were said to be good for sickness. One day they came near the

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place where Rosalia was buried; and Dan picked a bunch of the scarce autumn blossoms. "We mustn't put flowers there," Jule said. "Somebody would see them."

One day Dan went to see Mrs. Dunham. Her husband, whom he met on the street in Rockhill, told him that Phyllis had gone to Milwaukee. He found Mrs. Dunham on the porch with a white shawl over her knees. Her face brightened with pleasure. "I've been ill," she said. "You've been ill. Haven't you?"

"Not ill. I've not been very happy."

"There are a number of illnesses without names," she insisted. "We've both been ill; but we seem to be better."

Asters rocked on their rough stems. A spindle-shaped tree turned yellow. There was a spice in the colourless air like the cool odour of an apple. Children flocked along the street, swinging books in oil-cloth bags; Dan envied them, and regretted the uncertainty of his plans for the winter.

"Phyllis was very gloomy because you didn't come to see us any more. I knew you would come back. I am twice as old as she, and I have learned that things happen. That is not great wisdom; but I fear my child has not yet mastered it. I said you were too proud to limp; you would rather not walk at all."

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She saw that he was embarrassed, and said quickly, "Tell me a story. Whichever story you think of at the moment is the most beautiful one you know."

He hesitated. "I know one about a woman they called in the country Bad Han."

He poured out in an effort to tell it well his admiration, his gratitude, his awe. It was almost a paraphrase of his uncle's story; this gave to the narrative a simplicity which surprised and excited himself. Mrs. Dunham's delighted attention increased his own pleasure; and he spoke more and more slowly, adding sentence to sentence, until he knew no more to tell. †

"What a glorious old creature!" Mrs. Dunham exclaimed. "Did you ever see her?"

"I don't remember. I think not. I was very young when she died."

"What a pity! How wise she was! I think any one of her troubles would have killed one of us. We are so fragile. And she went calmly on, letting nothing break her heart. How beautifully you told it! I wish you would write it down for me. You must come to see me every week, and tell me a story each time."

Her appreciation made him want to talk about himself. There was so much that she did not know. But he was shy, and could not begin; perhaps, another day. . . .

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

He drove back to Beeler, thinking of himself. He wanted to go away to school. Mrs. Dunham reminded him of a world, beyond the fields and farm-houses and villages, the hills and the marsh, to which he believed that he belonged. He loved them; but they had given him all they had to give. He understood them now; and they were overborne by memories, a mass of memories, like the dark red and dim yellow autumn leaves, falling, confused.

He found the house empty. The hired girl had gone to see a sick aunt. His uncle had left a scrap of paper pinned to the door, with these words in his large, unaccustomed hand: "Gone to your father's."

The autumn dusk towered over him. It was dark; it was lofty; it was heavy; it was still. He felt very small and glad to be alive; that was a sort of happiness he had never known. He thought of his whole life, and tried to make of it a legend like the life of Han; but it was not long enough.

She had never had a son; but he felt toward her as if she were a mother—somehow, in a way that he did not understand, his mother. He loved his own mother, loved her still, when almost all the painfully close ties were broken. But she was very near to him, too near to be his mother as this woman he had never seen was. He thought, Every man has a mother; and many men together have a mother. He did not know who the men were who would

## PRIMITIVE

then be his brothers; but Han was their mother together.

He dreamed of her wandering in the marsh. It was a place for her. With her strange face and short hair, her beauty must have been curious like its beauty. Both she and it were old and not old. She was unlike other people as it was unlike other fields. It had no harvest; she had no child.

She was not dead in his dream of her, but still walking there. Not walking as a good spirit, caring for people, bringing them good fortune, but simply walking. She had not cared for Rosalia. Rosalia had died in her marsh. Perhaps during her life she had told people what to do, and helped them, and made them happy. But now she had nothing to do with these things.

Now she had nothing to do with life; but life resembled her. Had it ever been good to him or bad to him, or to Rosalia, or to anybody? Its purpose was to go on, just to go on.

There were times when one could see it, very solemn and clear. There were times when it was hidden by emotions like nightmares. There were times when it grew bright abruptly.

Was it always like that—to live? Were there always weathers and seasons in it, and never any lasting rest? Nightmare, and then the breaking of the nightmare, and then a cloudy light, and then a sharp, still light; and the best of it a blessedness that.

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one felt falling, falling, in a rain which did not always fall.

The boy thought, Blessedness did not come from myself. There had been his mother, and then Mike, and then Jule. Blessedness as purity, blessedness as sensuous joy, blessedness in the form of an old, dead woman. He had felt love alone, and after that love with a sense of awakening, and at last awe taking place of love.

What would come next? He did not need to know. His business was to go on, just to go on. He did not understand how; he did not care if he never understood. There had been and there would be days, weeks, months, and years, autumns like this and winters and springs and summers. He had known too few.

## 5. DEPARTING IN PEACE

ONE day at twilight the glossy bull splashed the water in the trough, rolling his wet brown eyes at Dan, who held the pole attached to his nose. "Drink, drink, or you'll go thirsty!" Dan said. The animal rubbed his dewlaps on the edge of the tank, and swallowed the water in large, audible gulps. Then he raised his head, and stared across the fields sighing.

Dan's eyes followed the bull's melancholy eyes: acres of stubble, fields ploughed for winter wheat, the forest already diaphanous—maroon and iron-grey lace, layer upon layer. Certain trees, far away, lifted frayed fans over the horizon.

Suddenly he saw moving there a company of shining forms. It was a flock of wild geese, flying extremely high, going south. They were grey, and would have been invisible, but their wings in motion glittered when they caught the light. He heard them honking. One above another, tier upon tier, they moved slowly like a troop of angels. The light faded; and the grey geese sank into the sky, leaving there a lonely solemnity, into which their faint clamour still fell.

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

He put the bull back in his stall. His chores were done. He sat on the porch.

The rim of the horizon seemed to have melted where the sun had gone. In the spare light, the hills shone as if the cattle by their cropping had polished the sod. Upon their slopes towered the trunks of hickory and elm in massive groups. Pulletts and cockerels still roosted on the lower boughs in the orchard, and spoke to each other in detached, metallic tones.

Over one end of the porch, wilted wild cucumbers rustled. Crows appeared over the hills, and crossed the valley in a straight line; their heavy bodies sank a little in the air, and were lifted again with each stroke of their wings. One croaked to another. The silence was emphasized by their voices, the solitude by their diminishing and vanishing forms, like birds of jet.

Dan tried to read; it was still light enough; but his eyes lifted continually from the page to peer through the twilight at the lawn, the barns, the lemon-yellow stacks, the trees, the branches thinning into air, the fields and woods, the glimmering road. The sky drooped all about its softly bright, sombre wings.

His parents had gone to Rockhill that afternoon, and were staying for a lecture at the church. He wanted to read, in order not to allow his disappointment to come definitely into his mind. For he

## DEPARTING IN PEACE

could not go away to school. His father was not well enough to care for the stock all winter alone; there was no work for a hired man; so he required Dan's help. And his mother had said, "You are still too young to leave home." There had been uncertain promises that he could go next year; but he felt little confidence in them.

It was cold, and too dark to read. He went into the house, and lit a lamp. Then a sentence in his book reminded him that he had forgotten to feed the brood-sow in the tepee.

He took a lantern, and carried a pail of slop through the orchard, stopping under the branches heavy with apples. There was still a faint light between the trees, which made the lantern unnecessary. The sow, who had farrowed the previous week, was kept in a small shed like a tent, so that her pigs could crawl under the eaves where she could not lie on them.

Dan opened the door. The sow grunted, and came over to the trough. He put down the smoky lantern, which made a twilight in the shed no brighter than the twilight outside, but yellow. He poured the slop in the trough. Meanwhile the little pigs, disturbed, climbed over each other, grunting in a soft treble. Dan stepped inside to look at them. They lay, very pink and fresh, in the clean straw, with their quivering noses and petal-shaped ears.

Then he closed the door and returned through

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

the orchard, carrying his pail. The prolonged whiteness of the sky was due to the moon, which cast up now before it as it rose a brilliant pallor. Similarly, the winter seemed to have thrown before it as a warning this pale, cold night. Dan wondered how he would be able to break its monotony and endure its loneliness. He decided not to wait for his parents, and when he went to bed, fell into a deep sleep which seemed to last only a moment.

Someone shook him. He dreamed an explanation of this, and woke. His father stood over his bed, breathing hard, his hair over his eyes, speaking in an angry tone. "Do you know what you've done? Do you know what you've done?"

"What's the matter?"

"Matter enough. Confound you, I never can trust you. Your head in the air, your nose in your books—little you care what happens." His voice trembled; he was extremely excited.

Dan sat up in bed. "But father, what has happened?"

"The tepee has burned up. The sow got out, but the pigs are dead. You left the lantern there. You're a fine one!"

Dan could scarcely speak for shame. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

His mother's voice came anxiously from the bottom of the stairs. "John! John! Don't you want something to eat?"

## DEPARTING IN PEACE

"No. I don't want anything."

"Won't you come down and sit with me while I eat?"

He rushed out of Dan's room and down the stairs, beside himself with irritation.

Dan put on his clothes. His father's temper frightened him; but he was ashamed of his carelessness, and knew also that if he did not go down, his father would think him indifferent and be still more angry.

His mother sat by the table. The lamp threw a streak of light across his father's eyes, glaring at the floor. Dan asked his mother, "Was the whole thing burned?"

She answered timidly, "Almost. The roof fell in."

"Did you put it out?"

"Your father did. We saw the flames from the hill."

His father tossed his head. "You want to know all about it, don't you? But you don't care. You never did." His voice grew loud.

Dan knew that now he would hear all his father's grievances. His mother turned pale.

"Since you were a baby you always thought yourself better than everybody. Better than your father. Too fine for farm-work. You wouldn't get your hands dirty. You never took any interest. Your mother and I can work our fingers to the bone,

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

feed you, clothe you—were you ever grateful? Not a bit. We owed it to you. We ought to be glad, I s'pose, to live with you."

His mother wept helplessly. Dan trembled; he was angry, with an unfamiliar anger. It did not seem important that it was his father who upbraided him. All the farmers, the men and boys, all the fields, the country itself seemed to denounce him. They were right; he was right; what could he say? He heard his mother's stifled sobs. Her face was sharp with fear, her mouth open as if about to speak.

"Oh, you're clever! You're good at books," his father sneered. "But tell me, young man, what's that good for? Will it give you a living? That's another thing. You always hated to work. You always made me feel like a slave-driver. And when I count on you for something, this is the way you do it. This is a good sample of your work!"

"Don't! Don't, John!" Dan's mother cried. He did not seem to hear.

"Nobody in the country was ever good enough for you. Good enough for your father and mother, but not for you. You always stuck up your nose. I s'pose you found some people in Rockhill that were more to your taste than us. The only one who ever suited you was that loafer who ran away with Rosalia. And you pretended you didn't know anything about it. It meant more to you to have him get what he wanted than the happiness of your

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family. It killed your aunt. It's just like your setting fire to the tepee. You don't care."

Dan could endure no more. He stood up, supporting himself against the table. "That's not fair. You know I didn't do it on purpose. I've done my best. You know it."

"I suppose you didn't mean to keep us from knowing when Rosalia ran away? You didn't do that on purpose either, did you?"

"I did what I thought was best. What else could I do?"

"Thought was best? Who set you up to say what is best? A mere boy—what do you know about such things? Your business is to do what your parents want. We feed and clothe you."

Dan was cold, mind and body; but his eyeballs burned. "I wish you'd stop holding it over my head that you feed and clothe me. Who brought me into the world? You did it because you wanted to. I didn't ask to be born. I didn't ask to have you for a father."

His father stood up clumsily. He shouted, "I won't take any of your sass! I've stood it long enough. I won't have it. You ought to be whipped." He started across the room. Dan's mother leaped to her feet and caught him by the arm. "John! Remember your promise! Don't do it!"

Trembling in every muscle, Dan pitied his father;

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but his pity was mixed with scorn. "Whip me if you want to. It's not the way to make me love you."

His father's broken voice was relentless. "I don't want you to love me. I don't want you. You can get out of my house. You can shift for yourself. See how you like that."

"I will. I'll go. I'm glad to go." Dan left the room. The door closed behind him. He went upstairs. There it was very cool and silent. Scarcely knowing what he did, he began to fold up his clothes and pack them in a suitcase.

He did not weep. What had happened was too impersonal. His father had rejected him; the country had rejected him. He was a failure in the country. It was a catastrophe, but one that hushed rather than roused his emotions. His mind seemed hollow; he could not plan or anticipate. For almost two hours he sat on the bed, stared at the walls, thinking merely, I am no longer the child of this house.

Then his father called from the bottom of the stairs, "Dan. Dan. Come down." Four words—loud, and vague, and separate. The sound of a man who was weeping. At first Dan did not grasp its significance. He rose, dismayed, almost indifferent, and went downstairs.

His mother knelt beside a chair, praying. His father's large hands hung down between his knees

## DEPARTING IN PEACE

like a pair of dead things. The muscles of his face moved convulsively; tears ran down his cheeks. He began to speak, not lifting his eyes. The words seemed torn out of his body like sharp, separate sobs. "Dan, I'm sorry for what I said. I want you to forget it. Don't blame me. I didn't know what I was saying."

It was terrible to see his strong father cry; Dan wished that he could stop him.

"I guess you weren't meant for a farmer's son. I was wrong to expect it. Maybe I've not been a good father to you. Maybe I could have done better. Your mother understands you."

Dan could not weep. He could not even share their emotion. He loved them; but he was no longer the child of their house; nothing could change that. He was sorry for them, slightly sorry for the child he had been; but he felt that his life was now somewhere else, though he did not know where.

His father went on, more calmly. "Your mother and I have been talking. We think you ought to have a chance to do what you're fitted for. We want you to go to the university. We'll find the money. I can get along without you."

Then the tears came to Dan's eyes; he wanted to run or laugh or sing. But there were his sad parents; what could he say to them? "Thank you, father. I won't always be good for nothing. I'll make you proud of me some way."

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

His father put his arms around him. Dan realized that he was almost as tall as his father, that his father was growing old. He kissed his mother. She said, "Let us ask God to help us and give us His blessing."

They knelt by three chairs; and for a moment Dan could hear nothing but his own heart-beats, his father breathing heavily, and the soft sound of his mother's weeping.

A few days later, Dan's mother drove him to Rockhill to take the train for Madison. The air was like a cool, grey drop of dew. They said nothing; each one thought of the distance which already separated them, of the distance which was to separate them still more widely. His father had kissed him and said huskily, "Be a good boy." His mother did not seem to think it necessary to say even that; she had given him her farewell instructions, long ago. In fact, Dan thought, she had said good-bye when he began to cease to be a child, that rainy spring when Mike had come. Now she seemed to pray, humbly, without kneeling or closing her eyes. The sight of her cheeks under her heavy hat and veil, her wistful mouth, her slight, erect body made a lump in his throat.

A maple on a hill trembled like a torch. The wind was colourless and cold. Dan remembered the wind in summer rising like a flail to strike the

## DEPARTING IN PEACE

sky, and the glare which fell in a sickening chaff, and was glad that he was leaving his country in its autumn. Now the ghosts which he imagined lingering along its thoroughfares, and the living ones he loved were at peace and willing to let him go. Soon the winter, of which the wind already whispered, would come and put an end to their animation and the animation of branches and crops and flowers. But he would be far away, where if anything was dead, he would not know what it had been when it lived.

His mother had some shopping to do; and he left her to say good-bye to the Dunhams. "Phyllis is still in Milwaukee," Mrs. Dunham said. "I think she will go to Madison in January. You will see her.

"It is splendid for you. I am disappointed; I thought I should have you for a son instead of my daughter. However mothers and fathers must be left behind.

"Don't be too serious; I tell you that because no one needs to tell you, Be serious."

She took three chrysanthemums out of a vase. "Here are three flowers, one for each of your mothers; one for your own mother, one for that magnificent Han, and one—for me. Good-bye."

In his imagination, as he went down the street, there were three other flowers—for his uncle and his father, and for Mike. Now he would surely meet

## THE APPLE OF THE EYE

Mike again, and make his peace with him.

He gave the chrysanthemums to his mother. She said, "Promise me, Dan, to make your friends among good, clean boys and girls. I want you to form some church connection in Madison. Ask God to show you a way to use your talents for His kingdom. Write me everything."

They stood on the station-platform. The tracks narrowed away in both directions, empty and dull. Many restless women stood beside their baggage.

They heard the whistle. Then the little train slid smoothly round the curve. Clear puffs of smoke blew like buds from the smokestack. At first it did not appear to approach them, but grew large in an increasing clamour of its wheels, brakes, and bell. It stopped. In the confusion, he felt his mother's arms convulsively around him, and saw her upturned, lonely face. He found a seat, put up his suitcases; and the train started slowly. He stared out of the window, his eyes wide but extremely dim, thinking of his mother as she drove back over the autumn roads, clinging to her faith in him, praying for the perfection of his life.

*Kewaskum, Wisconsin, 1918—New York, 1924.*

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